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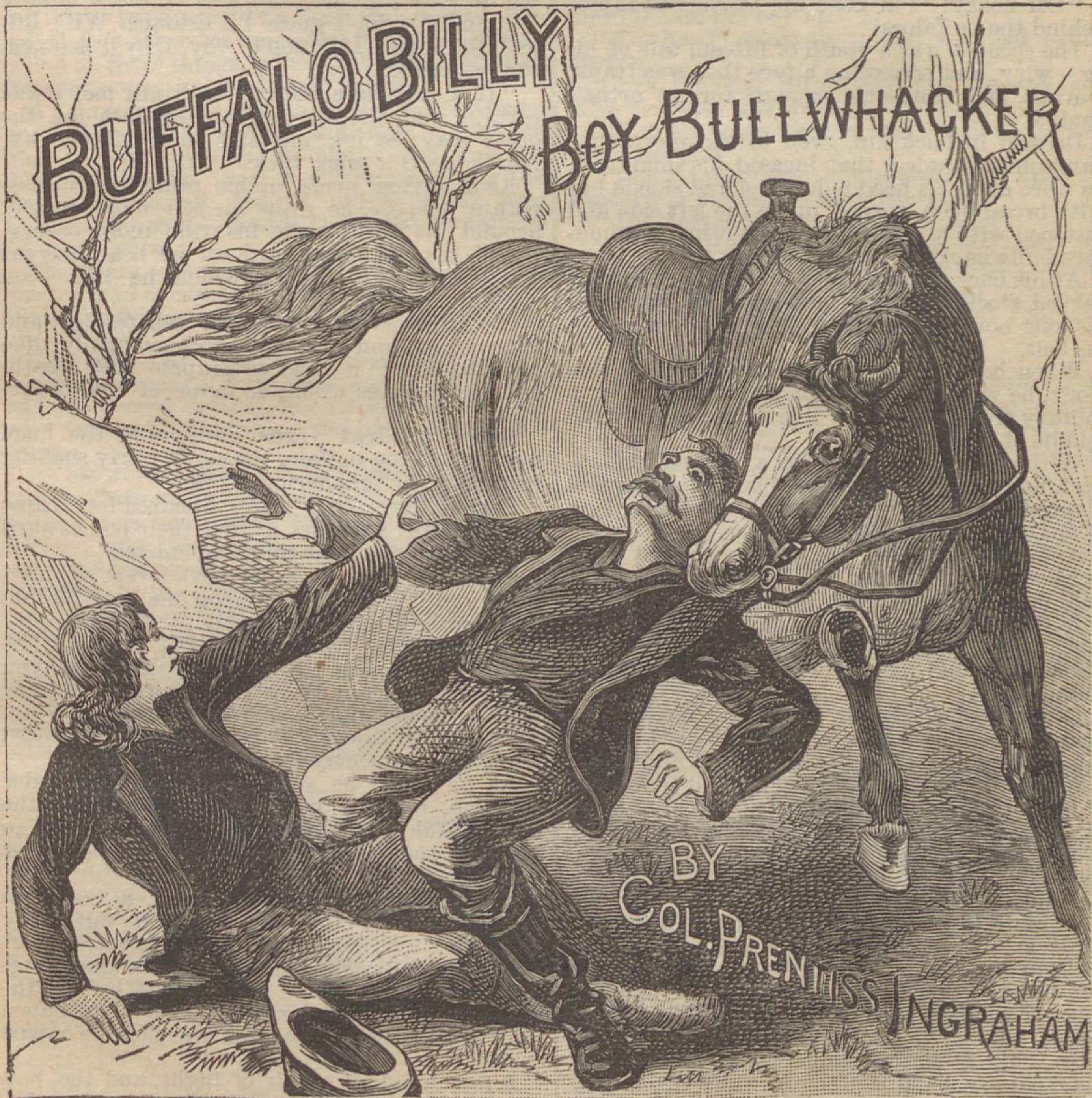
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LITTLE GRAY, SEEING THE DANGER OF HIS YOUNG MASTER, RUSHED UP WITH SAVAGE FURY AND SEIZED
THE SHOULDER OF THE MAN IN HIS SHARP TEETH DRAGGING HIM BACKWARD.

Buffalo Billy,

THE BOY BULLWHACKER;

OR,
THE DOOMED THIRTEEN.

A Strange Story of the Silver Trail.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE THE MUTINEER," "BUFFALO BILL'S BET," "WIZARD WILL,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

FOR LIFE OR DEATH.

"OH hokey! I'm gone up, for there's Injuns behind the buffaloes!"

The speaker was a youth of fifteen, tall of his age, wiry, and possessing a face that was frank, fearless, and handsome enough for an artist's study.

Dressed in buckskin, even to the moccasins, handsomely beaded, that incased his small feet, he wore upon his head a dove-colored slouch hat with broad brim, turned up on the left side and fastened with a gold pin representing a miniature bullwhacker's whip.

At his back slung a Colt's repeating rifle, with carved stock, and silver-mounted, as were also his long bowie-knife and a pair of revolvers in his belt.

When he uttered the words that open this story, he was standing upon the stout limb of a solitary tree, that stood like a sentinel in the middle of a vast prairie.

With one hand he clung to a branch for support, and with the other he shaded his eyes and glanced out over the plain, while a certain look of anxiety rested upon his fine face.

And, as he looked, his cheeks flushed with excitement, his large, black eyes full of fire and determination, and his long, dark-brown hair floating back behind him, fanned by the stiff breeze that was blowing, there came to his ears a sound like the low rumble of distant thunder.

Louder and louder it grew, and nearer and nearer came the cause—an immense herd of buffaloes flying like the wind over the prairie.

It was the thundering sound of their thousands of hoofs that had at first warned him of danger, as he was trudging on foot along the weary prairie trail, and at once his eye had fallen upon the solitary tree, standing grim, yet inviting in the midst of the plain.

"I guess 'twas made to order, for just such an occasion," he said, gayly, as he took refuge amid its branches, feeling no concern in such a haven; but one glance over the waste, and he had discovered that the herd of buffaloes, flying at top speed, numbered thousands, and that behind them, only a short distance away, and in full chase came a band of Indians, fully a hundred in number.

"Whew!" and the boy gave a long whistle, and uttered the words that head this chapter.

"I wish, now I've climbed this tree, that I could pull it up after me," he said lugubriously, at the same time looking with instinctive caution at his arms. "If my poor mother and sisters could only see me now, I guess they'd wave me a long farewell, for if some old iron-headed buffalo bull don't knock this tree up by the roots, the Injuns will fill me full of holes. Ugh! I kinder feel as though arrows were sticking in me now; but"—and his eyes flashed, as he spoke—"I've got six shots in my rifle for long range, and twelve in my revolvers for close quarters, and if Billy Cody goes under, he leaves wailing in the red-skin camp."

On came the buffaloes, and behind them the savage Sioux, and all were heading directly for the lone tree and its daring but youthful occupant.

"By the Rockies! I've got a thought," he suddenly exclaimed. "The buffaloes are heading directly for our camp, and I'll try it, and if I go in all right, I guess I'll astonish Wild Bill and the boys. If I don't, why, they'll astonish the red-skins."

"If I stay here the reds will kill me, that's certain, and the chances are against me the other way; so it's 'nip and tuck' either way, but I guess I'll take 'tuck.'"

As if having made up his mind to some desperate purpose, he drew his belt more tightly around his waist, made his rifle more secure, pulled his hat down hard on his head, and sat down on the limb upon which he had been standing.

His face was now pale, yet still fearless and determined, and his lips were set firmly, like one who knew he had to grapple with Death, and the chances wholly in favor of his antagonist.

Not a hundred yards away came the huge herd of flying buffalo, the earth fairly shaking beneath their thundering hoofs.

Behind them, only a few hundred feet, came the mounted warriors urging their ponies hard to overtake the game they had started.

With his keen eyes the boys swept the herd over, and his glance fell upon one huge buffalo bull that was heading directly for the tree.

"That's my racer, and I'm thinking he won't need spurs. Now, Billy Cody, if you don't mount right there'll be mourning in your Kansas home, and you won't need burying, for those buffaloes will trample you into dust; but, come what may, here goes!"

As he spoke he swung himself down under the limb, holding by his hands, and, just as the huge buffalo bull dashed beneath him, he let go his hold and dropped astride of his "racer," as he had called the animal.

A wild, startled bellow, a snort, a bound in the air, and the bull led the herd; but Billy Cody had not been unseated, and in the exuberance of his boyish spirits he gave a loud, ringing war-whoop, which was heard by the Indians and savagely answered, for at a glance they saw the desperate deed was done to escape them.

A few hundred yards of flight, and the boy felt perfectly at home on the back of his hairy steed, for he was a superb rider, and said, grimly:

"I guess I can try my luck on a red-skin now."

As he spoke he unslung his rifle, and, with remarkable agility sprung to his feet, and balancing himself, turned half round, and fired, and down from his pony to the ground dropped the leading warrior, while a shower of arrows flew over the head of the daring boy.

But, delighted at his success, and his frightened buffalo leading the herd, he seemed to feel no fear, and again and again his rifle flashed, and off to the happy hunting-grounds sped the spirit of a savage warrior with each rifle-crack.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY BULLWHACKER.

"WELL, boys, who comes here?"

The speaker was a man who will go down to history as one of the greatest of border heroes, for it was none other than Wild Bill, though why called *Bill*, when his name was James B. Hicok, is one of those things, which in the mysteries of frontier nomenclature is past finding out.

A young man at that time, for I write of twenty or more years ago, Wild Bill was one of the most powerful men on the plains, and was admitted to be the "best man" physically in the employ of Russell, Majors and Waddell, who then ran the supply trains to all the important Western posts.

The train of which Wild Bill was wagon-master, had encamped for the night on the South Platte, and was *en route* to Salt Lake with supplies.

But, while all were busy preparing for the night encampment, the keen eye of Wild Bill had discovered several horsemen approaching, who he knew at a glance did not belong to his train.

At his words, all who heard them looked up, and soon after five horsemen rode into camp.

They were all of them fearless, hardy-looking fellows, with swarthy faces, long hair, and well mounted and armed.

"Who is the boss of this bull outfit?" asked one, glancing over the crowd of teamsters, and bullwhackers who had gathered around.

"I am, pard; how can I serve you?" answered Wild Bill, stepping forward.

"We are in bad luck, for one of our guides was killed in a scrimmage with Indians, and the other took sick and died, and we'll pay well for a man to put us through."

"Which way going, pard?"

"East; back to the States, with a wagon-load o' silver dust," was the honest reply.

"Wouldn't tell that to every crowd, pard; but we profess to be honest in this bull train."

"I know who you are, for our guide told us one o' Russell, Majors and Waddells bull-trains would be along soon, and that Wild Bill was boss of it; are you Wild Bill?"

"That's what men call me. How many in your party?"

"Thirteen."

"Ah!"

"What is it, pard?" asked the stranger, as Wild Bill said no more.

"Oh! I'm a little gone on superstition, and thirteen is an unlucky number; but you want

a guide back to Kansas City, or Leavenworth, you say?"

"That's it, exactly."

"One wagon, or more?"

"Two, one with silver chest, t'other with traps; we've been digging ore in Colorado and struck it rich, and are going East to see the old folks, and then come back and work out our lead."

"We drive six mules to the team, are all well mounted and thoroughly heeled with shooting-irons, and you can't scare up thirteen better pards on the border than we are, if I say it myself."

"You look square, and I guess I can accommodate you with a guide, if you are willing to pay well," said Wild Bill.

"We'll give him a cool hundred apiece to run us into Leavenworth."

"Done! get down and take supper with us, and I'll look the boy up."

"The boy?" asked the miner, who had before spoken.

"Yes, the boy; Billy Cody, and the boss bullwhacker with this train."

"But we don't want a bullwhacker, for we drive mules."

"Don't make any difference. Bill knows a mule from his ears to his business end."

"How old is this Boy Bullwhacker?"

"I'm not his father or mother, and can't exactly say; but I'm his friend unto death, and the man who says he isn't as good as any one in this train, quarrels with me. He's about fourteen, though, to answer your question."

"Oh, we want a *man*!"

"Bosh! why won't a woman do, if she's as good as a man? and Billy Cody is every time equal to a man, whether it's on the trail, in a fight, bullwhacking, or riding a mustang, and he can out-shoot anybody in this outfit."

"But he's a *boy*!"

"And I tell you he's a *boss* boy. Where is the youngster?" and Wild Bill glanced over the crowd of bullwhackers and teamsters.

"He's off on a hunt; dropped back this morning to bring in some game for supper," answered one of the men who belonged to the boy's mess.

An anxious look covered the face of Wild Bill and he said:

"The boy's generally on time, and should be here; but, hullo! here comes game, pards, and right into camp."

All eyes were turned across the prairie, and over a rise came a surging, flying mass of buffaloes, heading almost directly for the camp.

"Turn 'em! turn 'em, boys, or they'll stampede the train!" yelled Wild Bill, and throwing himself upon the back of his own horse that was feeding near, he dashed off to turn the herd, accompanied by the five miners, and followed by two-score of the train-men.

Shots and yells at the heads of the flying mass turned the herd aside, so that they would not dash through the camp, and then all eyes became fixed upon one object, or rather two, for mounted upon a huge bull was a human form, riding in splendid style, though the animal he bestrode was dropping slowly back behind the herd, sorely fatigued by the run and the weight he bore.

And behind this novel sight, was now visible a band of Indians, urging their horses on at top speed, and, at the same time, sending arrows after the straining buffalo, and his daring rider, who ever and anon faced half round and returned the compliment by a shot from his rifle.

A wild yell from the buffalo-rider, told that he saw his friends and help ahead, and it warned the red-skins of danger to them, for with savage whoops of hatred and disappointment they turned quickly to the right-about, just as Wild Bill shouted:

"Pards, there comes my boy! Three cheers for Buffalo Billy, the Boy Bullwhacker!"

And with a yell the three cheers were given while Wild Bill, urging his horse forward toward the still frightened and nobly struggling buffalo bull, cried out:

"Look out, Billy, for you are going by camp, and I'm going to drop him."

"All right, let him have it," came the answer, and Wild Bill reined his horse suddenly back, raised his rifle, and seemingly without aim, fired.

The buffalo gave a mighty bound, as though hard hit, swayed wildly, and after a short run fell dead in his tracks. While Buffalo Billy, as he had just been christened, nimbly caught on his feet, and waving his hat around his head, gave vent to one loud long shout of joy at his escape.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOY BULLWHACKER TURNS GUIDE.

As the buffalo herd swept away, Buffalo Billy, as I will now call him, shook himself together, and said laconically:

"No crape on the door of the home in Kansas just yet; but I'm awfully shaken up, for that old bull ain't a pacer, and his backbone was so sharp I guess I won't sit down in comfort for a week. Well, Bill, I'm back," and he walked to meet Wild Bill, who was approaching him, followed by half the men of the train.

"So I see, Billy; but in the name o' thunder! how'd you get your mount?"

"Oh! easy enough," was the quiet response, while a merry twinkle was in the boy's eye.

"But how did you get on him, Billy?"

"Just dropped on him; but it was how to get off that troubled me; but thanks to you here I am safe and sound, after a ten-mile ride over the prairie.

"I tell you, Bill, it would have been prime sport, if the reds hadn't been in full chase, and I expected an arrow would bring down my steed, or knock me off, for the old bull, from leading the herd, got to dropping back in the rear, and that wasn't pleasant."

"Billy! Billy, why don't you tell us how you got on that buffalo!" demanded Wild Bill impatiently.

"I'm trying to, but how can I talk when you're all grinning at me as though I'd done something funny. Why, Bill, I could shave your mustache off with that old bull's backbone, and—"

Shouts of laughter made inaudible what more the boy would have said, and he joined in the

merriment, and then told the story of his strange adventure, after which Wild Bill turned to the miners and said, proudly:

"Now, didn't I tell he was a boss boy?"

"Oh, he'll do; we'll take him, if he'll go," was the unanimous reply of the strangers.

"I should think so! A boy who can ride a buffalo and shoot Injuns at the same time, ought to be able to run a train across the country," declared Wild Bill, and turning to his young friend, he continued:

"Billy, I has promised you to these gentlemen, who want a guide."

"Must I leave you, Bill?" asked the boy.

"Oh! you don't always want to be tied to your granny's apron-strings, do you?"

"No, or I would not have left my home in Kansas; but I don't like to leave you, Bill, as you have been so kind to me."

"Nonsense! I wouldn't see none of the boys bully you, when you first took to bullwhacking, Billy; but now you have a chance to make a name for yourself, and to carry home to your mother a good thirteen hundred dollars, and she needs it, as you know."

"Oh! I'll go, Bill, if only to help my poor mother. What am I to do?"

"Run these gentlemen and their pards into Leavenworth, and when I tell you they have one prairie schooner loaded with silver dust you will know how particular you must be, for you ain't going on a frolic, Billy."

"No, I know all the dangers in our way, but I'll face them, and we'll go through if these gentlemen have got the right grit," boldly responded Buffalo Billy.

"Bravo for you, my boy! I like your style, and you'll find us grit, clean through," responded Hank Hayes, the "captain" of the miners' train.

"Well, it's a bargain. Come to camp and have supper with us, and then you can start for your lay-out, pards; but, Billy, where's your pony?"

"I got down to shoot an elk an' he skipped for the train; I guess he's here by this time."

"Yas, he comed in a while ago, and looks as though he'd hed a long run," announced a teamster.

"Never mind him; I'll lend you an extra horse I have, and you'll find him a goer; but he's such a devil none of us care to ride him, but you won't mind him, after what I saw you do on a buffalo," remarked Captain Hank Hayes.

"If the horse is a good one, sell him to me," suggested Wild Bill.

"I am willing, for as I tell you, he's a devil; but he's fast, and can run all day."

"Name your price."

"Two hundred."

"Done! Here's your money. Now, Billy my boy, the horse is yours as a present from me, for you could ride a streak o' lightning once you got your legs across it," assured Wild Bill.

Bill made no reply, but stepping forward grasped the hand of his friend, and this silent act spoke more of his thanks than words would have done.

Wild Bill quickly turned away, for he was deeply attached to the boy, and with the courage

of a lion had the heart of a woman, and hated to give him up, but felt that he was acting for his good.

"Come, pards, let us go and chaw buffalo-steaks now, and talk over the best trail for you to take East," he said; so the party went into camp, and soon sat down to a delicious supper for hungry men, and, with darkness creeping over the prairie, and the fires blazing brightly, the scene was one of picturesque beauty, and only to be seen on the plains of the far West.

A substantial repast, a long talk with Wild Bill, a general handshaking of farewell with the men of the train, and Billy, the Boy Bullwhacker, left his comrades, with whom he had shared many hardships and dangers on the long trail, to go with strangers, to guide them back to the land of civilization, and to place upon his young shoulders the weight of a fearful responsibility.

CHAPTER IV.

A NOVEL BATTLE.

"CAPTAIN, where is your lay-out?" was the business-like question of Buffalo Billy, as he threw himself into his saddle, with a muttered exclamation, as he was suddenly recalled to the fact of his ten-mile ride on the sharp back of a buffalo.

"Is thar a pin in yer saddle, Billy?" asked an old teamster.

"It kinder feels that way, Buck: now, captain, where's the lay-out?"

"About ten miles to the southward, on the banks of a small creek; we've been there since our guide died, and have been on the lookout for your train; are you ready?" answered Hank Hayes.

Buffalo Billy's reply was to wave his hat to the crowd, grasp Wild Bill's hand in another parting grip, and dash away, followed by the miners.

"Be careful o' those reds who chased you this afternoon, Billy, they are hanging round, you may be certain," warningly called out Wild Bill.

At a rapid gallop the little party of horsemen rode on, their Boy Guide narrowly watching the prairie ahead, and his companions as attentively watching him, and gaining confidence in his ability, as he held an unswerving line for their camp, they having told him the locality where it lay.

A few miles were gone over, when all of a sudden the moon arose above the prairie horizon, and Billy drew rein.

"What is it, guide?" asked Hank Hayes.

"I saw some shadows pass between us and the moon, and they were Injuns," was the cool reply.

"What is to be done?"

"Oh, they don't see us, and we can bend to the right and perhaps avoid them; you say your pards are well camped?"

"Yes, they can hold the camp against a hundred red-skins."

"Good! then let us on," and swerving to the right oblique, the guide held on his way for awhile, but to again suddenly draw rein.

"Those fellows do see us, for they have changed their course," said the young guide.

"How do you know, youngster?"

"See 'em," was the short reply.

"You can see more'n we can."

"My eyes are younger; but yours are sharp or ought to be, as you've been searching for dust."

"You bet; we was sharp-eyed enough to strike a rich lead; but I can't see any sign—can you, pards?"

"Nary!"

"Not a shadder."

"The youngster's too sharp-eyed fer me."

"I see ther pararer, ther skies, ther moon an' ourselves."

Such were the answers of the miners; but they did not convince Billy that he was mistaken, for he cautiously rode forward again, and soon after came to another halt, and asked:

"Are your horses fast and fresh?"

"Not very; why?" answered the captain.

"Well, my pony is dead-beat, and therefore we will have to fight for it," was the cool rejoinder.

"What do you mean, my boy?" asked Hank Hayes, now convinced that the young guide was assured of pressing danger.

"I mean that the Indians who chased me on my buffalo this afternoon, were lying in wait, and have now surrounded us."

"What! Do you mean it?"

"I do; they are nearly half a mile from us, but have formed a circle entirely around us, and are moving as we move."

"But we can break through their line."

"We could, perhaps, if all our horses were fresh and swift; but they would at once charge upon us did we attempt it, and now they are closing in their circle."

The miners were now impressed with the danger of their position, for sharp glances around the horizon showed them that the Indians could now be distinctly seen; and, although they were men who had roughed it for years on the border, they felt that their safety lay wholly in the hands of a boy, and to him they turned for advice, and Hank Hayes asked:

"Well, Billy, what's to be done about it?"

"Fight it out!"

"How many Indians are there in the party?"

"About a hundred."

"And we are six; the chances are fearfully against us."

"Oh! we'll never say die! See, they are closing in rapidly and what we do we must do quickly," said the boy.

"But what are we to do, Billy?"

"Fight them right here, and Wild Bill will come to our rescue, as soon as he hears the firing, for I will open first with my repeating rifle, and he knows its voice."

"Well, you is ther doctor, boy, so give yer prescription, an' we'll take ther dose," said one of the miners.

Billy cast another searching glance around the horizon, and then sprung to the ground, at the same time calling upon the miners to do likewise, while he said reproachfully:

"Kit, old fellow, I hate to, but I must, for it's life or death with us now."

Drawing his knife he at once cut the throat of

his pony, who fell to the ground in a dying condition, while the miners, grim bordermen that they were, seemed momentarily horrified.

"Quick! down with your horses, for they must be our barricade," cried the young guide, and four of the five at once obeyed.

"Why don't you obey?" angrily cried Billy Cody, as the fifth miner stood quietly by the side of his animal.

"You said *hosses*, boy pard, an' I rides a mule," was the laconic response.

"So much the better for you; his hide is tougher," laughed the Boy Guide, and springing forward he quickly severed the mule's jugular vein, and then, by his advice the animals were drawn together, so as to form a circular barricade, and into this the men sprung, and squatted down, their arms ready for use.

In forming this novel breastwork, of their horses which had but a moment before been bearing them over the prairie, a couple of minutes only were consumed, yet in that time the Indians had advanced rapidly, and were now not three hundred yards distant, and charging upon the little party from all sides.

The Boy Guide was perfectly cool, and with his repeating rifle across the back of his dead pony, said quietly:

"Wait until they come within sixty yards before you fire; I will give it to them at twice that distance, and Wild Bill will know my rifle is ringing out for help."

"But will he come?" asked Hank Hayes.

"You bet; Wild Bill never deserted a friend in trouble or a foe in a fight. Here they come, so keep cool and don't throw a shot away."

As Billy Cody spoke he ran his eye along the sights of his rifle, for the moon now shone brightly upon the scene, and the next instant the formidable weapon began to flash forth its six shots with a rapidity that was marvelous and a skill that was deadly, for down went several horses and riders.

"Now let them have it!" cried the boy, and the Mississippi *yagers*, with which the miners were armed, sent their leaden bullets into the charging red-skins, while the Boy Guide reloaded his rifle with a cool and rapid hand, and had it ready for use by the time the last of his comrades had fired, and once more it spoke with deadly effect.

Unable to face such a fearful rain of lead, the Indians broke in confusion, and quickly fled out of range, followed by the exultant shouts of the whites.

"Boy, Wild Bill spoke gospel truth when he called you the boss!" cried Hank Hayes.

"Who is hurt?" was Buffalo Billy's response, and he looked around upon the little party upon whom showers of arrows had been sent, the carcasses of the animals catching them.

"Nary one, boy, tho' some arrers hit ther ole mule, but wouldn't stick, he's so tough; but is ther reds comin' ag'in?" answered the owner of the mule.

"Oh, yes! they'll doubtless charge in force on one side next time, as they see we are too much for them in a line."

"And here they come: steady all!" called out Hank Hayes, and all saw that the Indians were now coming in two columns, and once more the

fight began, Buffalo Bill again opening at long range with his repeating rifle.

This time the red-skins made a more determined charge, and not until the Boy Guide called out to his comrades to drop their rifles, and use revolvers, were they checked, and then only when the fire of the besieged became most deadly.

"By Hokey! they don't like it a bit," cried Billy, joyously, and he again turned to see who had been hurt, saying pleasantly:

"I got my hair parted with an arrow, but it's all right."

"An' a arrer glanced on ther iron hide o' this durned muel an' cut into my shoulder," growled Dan Beckett.

"Anybody else hurt?" asked Hank Hayes.

"Nary! I guesses they'll let us alone now, durn 'em," returned a miner.

"You don't know Injuns, if you think so, for they'll be more in earnest now and try cunning," was Billy Cody's opinion.

"Cunning hain't goin' ter sarve 'em eny," responded Beckett.

"That we will have to wait and see. Hullo! see their little game now," and the boy pointed out upon the prairie, to where several dark objects were moving slowly toward the barricade.

"They is creepin' upon us on their hands an' knees," said Benton Burke, a miner.

"No, they are shoving their dead ponies before them as they come; see, there are a dozen horses, and about three Injuns behind each, now we have to look out," and Buffalo Billy eagerly gazed upon the dark, moving objects that were slowly, but surely drawing nearer the besieged miners.

Presently the repeating rifle flashed, and with a wild war-whoop a savage sprung up from behind a pony and fell dead in his tracks, while the boy remarked quietly:

"He wasn't careful enough, and—but hurrah! bravo! there's Wild Bill and his boys," and as he spoke loud shouts were heard beyond the Indian line, followed by shots and the sound of hoof-strokes, and into view dashed half a hundred men on horseback, scattering the red-skins in wild flight and confusion.

"Billy, my boy, where are you?" then came in the well-known voice of Wild Bill.

"Here! but don't hurt our dead Injuns," cried the Boy Guide, and he bounded out of the barricade, followed by his comrades.

"Six of you, good! Nobody's checks called in? Didn't I tell yer my young pard were a boss boy, for I recognize his work there," and Wild Bill pointed to the slain animals.

"You did for a fact, and he is chain-lightning, and if he can't take our train through, nobody can," was the answer of Hank Hayes, and the Boy Bullwhacker found himself indeed a hero on the border, where it took men of nerve to win a name.

CHAPTER V.

THE BURIED TREASURE.

It was many weeks after the miners' fight with the Indians, that a wagon, drawn by six mules, and followed by thirteen horsemen, was

slowly approaching the Solomon River, near the center of what is now the State of Kansas.

A glance at the wagon and team, and the costumes of the horsemen would indicate that they had passed through many hardships, for the wheels were bound up with rawhide ropes, the harness was mended in so many places, that it was hard to tell which was the original and which the patches, while the clothing of the men was travel-soiled and much worn.

And yet, the faces of the men were cheerful, for their dangers were being left behind them, and in a few more weeks they would reach the Mecca of their hopes, and their Boy Guide would have run them in safety into Leavenworth.

It was near sunset, and the eyes of all were searching the prairie waste ahead in hope of seeing a winding stream on which to encamp for the night, for they had been compelled to make a wide *detour* from the regular train, in order to avoid Indians and road-agents, reported by westward-going trains they had met, to be lying in wait for the silver miners returning home.

And this wide circuit had cost them the loss of one of their wagons, and half their mules, and so shaken up the other vehicle, with its heavy load, that it was hourly in danger of depositing its precious cargo upon the earth.

"I'm a-prayin' fer two things now, pard, an' that is that ther ole hearse will hold up on its legs, an' that we'll not hav to go inter a dry camp* to-night."

"Those are my prayers, too, Burke, but I fear they will not be answered in either case," said Carl Moran, a handsome young miner of twenty-five, whose small hands and feet, and general appearance indicated that he had been born a gentleman, whatever had been the cause of his becoming a miner in the far West.

"Upon the principle of the prayers of the wicked availing naught, pards, I guess; but I always ask Buffalo Billy here, when I want to know anything. How is it, boy—will the hearse hold out, and will we strike a dry camp to-night?" and Hank Hayes turned to the Boy Guide, who had brought them safely through all dangers thus far, and who was mounted upon a wiry, spirited animal which he had named Little Gray, and the same horse that Wild Bill had presented him.

"Oh! there's a stream not far ahead, I know, from the lay of the land; but as to the old cart holding out, I don't—"

A sudden crashing of timbers interrupted what more he would have said, and with a snap following the crash, the wagon was a wreck, for the foreaxle had broken in two, and a wheel had fallen in fragments, and the pole was rent in twain, which startled the mules and caused them to bound forward with a force that jerked the vehicle into a mass which a wheelwright could not have remedied.

"Curse the luck!" and various harder epithets sprung from thirteen lips in chorus, while, unable to repress his boyish humor, Buffalo Billy broke forth in a peal of ringing

laughter. "It's durned funny, hain't it, boy, ter hev our fortin' spilt heur on ther pararer, an' no help in hundreds o' miles," said Benton Burke growlingly.

"Oh! there's no need crying over spilt milk for—"

"But it ain't spilt milk; it are spilt silver, boy."

"Well, there is but one thing to do about it."

"And that is, Billy?" asked Carl Moran.

"To *cache* it here and then go on to Leavenworth after wagons."

"Lordy, boy, we hesn't ther time, for we hes ter git back ter Colorado an' work out our lead, or we might git left," declared Burke.

"All we can do, as Billy says, is to bury the treasure, and we can go with what we can carry, and that will give us a good time and make our folks comfortable," put in Carl Moran.

"And what then, pard?" inquired Hank Hayes, who was the nominal leader of the party.

"Oh! when we have dug all we can git out of the mines, we can git this on our way back to ther States, for it will keep."

This advice of Carl Moran was about the best that could be followed under the circumstances, and to lose no time they at once set to work placing on the mules all the silver they wished to carry, after which a hole was dug in the prairie, the sod being carefully taken off to replace again, and the dirt deposited upon the wagon-tilt.

An hour's work, and the treasure was buried and sodded over carefully, while the extra dirt was wrapped up to throw into the nearest stream.

"Now the wagon," said Buffalo Billy, and the broken vehicle was dragged some distance away and set fire to, after which the Boy Guide drew a rough map of the locality and bearings, and the party started once more on their way, the youth walking and driving pegs made from the wheel-spokes, into the prairie as he went along.

"There goes my last stake, and there's a stream," suddenly cried Buffalo Billy, as in the darkness ahead, a line of cottonwoods was discerned, which he knew fringed the banks of a prairie stream.

"I'll go and cut you some stakes, Billy," said Hank Hayes, and then all rode forward, leaving the boy standing by the side of the last peg he had driven into the ground.

In a short while Hank returned, and the stake line was continued to the base of a large cotton wood, upon which a mark was made.

"Now I'll finish the map, and then you can find the treasure with your eyes shut," said Billy, and, by the firelight, for a cheerful fire was soon burning, he made the necessary diagram complete, and handed it to Carl Moran, saying as he did so:

"If you can't strike the trail right, look me up and I'll find your treasure for you, for there's a fortune in that hole back on the prairie, and it won't do to lose it."

"You are right, boy; it won't do to lose it, for, as you say, there's a fortune there for one

* Dry camp—To encamp where there is no water.

man," and a strange, evil glitter came into the eyes of Carl Moran, which Billy detected; but he made no reply, and turned away to look after the comfort of Little Gray, who in spite of the reputation given him for deviltry by Hank Hayes, was a splendid animal, and as faithful to his youthful master as a dog would have been.

An hour more and, after a hearty supper the miners sought rest, excepting Hank Hayes, whose night it was to stand guard with Buffalo Billy.

But, with the first ray of dawn in the East they awoke to continue their journey homeward—no, not all awoke, for there was one who remained quiet, unheeding the jokes of his comrades to arouse him.

"Come, Burke, we'll leave you behind if you don't rouse yourself," said Carl Moran approaching, and shaking his comrade.

But no answer came, and Carl Moran started back with a cry upon his lips, and the startling words:

"Great God! boys, he's dead!"

It was too true; the spirit of the miner, from some cause unknown, had taken flight, and he had sunk to sleep forever, while his comrades slumbered peacefully around him; and the alert sentinels on duty had not discovered the approach of the foe that none could elude.

Beneath the shade of the cottonwoods, upon the banks of the limpid stream, Benton Burke found a grave—the first of the doomed thirteen.

CHAPTER VI.

A BOY'S THREAT AND A MAN'S DEED.

WITHOUT further accident the miners reached Leavenworth under the guidance of Buffalo Billy, and the boy, with his well-earned money, started for the home of his mother and sisters, where he at once became a hero in their eyes, and received a welcome that made his heart glad.

But there was one thing that troubled the Boy Bullwhacker, for he soon discovered that his sister, Julia, to whom he was devotedly attached, was deeply interested in a young man of whom little good could be said.

Kent King, for such was his name, was certainly a very handsome man, possessed a fine form, and had very winning ways, and was noted as the best shot and rider in that part of the country, and was looked upon as a person whom it would not be safe to arouse.

But Billy Cody had heard strange stories of him, and that he was a man that no true woman should own as a friend, and this he made known to his sister, who, he saw with regret, had become more interested in the handsome stranger than she cared to admit.

Seeing that she paid no heed to his remonstrance regarding Kent King, Buffalo Billy concluded he would take the matter in his own hands, for, as he soon expected to start across the plains again, he did not wish to leave his sister under the influence of a man for whom he had formed the bitterest hatred.

Watching his opportunity, one day after Kent King had departed from the house, Billy threw himself upon Little Gray and soon over-

took the young man, who was attired in a fancy suit of buckskin, for he was considerable of a dandy in his dress.

"Well, Billy, which way?" asked the gambler, for such he really was, as the boy dashed up.

"I am after you, Kent King, for I have something to say to you," was the decided reply.

"Out with it, boy, for I do not care to be detained," answered Kent King, nettled by the boy's manner.

"You will remain long enough to hear what I have to say, Kent King."

"By Heaven! you take a saucy tone for a boy; but, for the sake of your sister, I'll not clip your comb, youngster."

"Kent King, for the sake of my sister I demand that you never again visit my mother's house."

A scornful laugh was the response, and then came the rude question:

"And suppose I say I will, what then?"

"I will see that you never repeat your visit," was the fearless response.

"You! you, a boy, make threats to me?" and the man turned livid.

"Yes, for I know you to be a card sharp, a scamp and a murderer."

"Ha! I will have to teach you a lesson, youngster," and the stout riding-whip of the gambler was raised for a blow; but it did not descend, for instantly the muzzle of a revolver stared him in the face, and it was held in a hand of iron, while Billy said scornfully:

"Strike, Kent King, and I'll save my sister future misery."

The man saw that the boy was master, and he had heard enough of his career to know that his life would be the forfeit of a blow, and he said calmly:

"I was a fool, Cody, to lose my temper with you, for it is right that you should act for your sister's welfare. Lower your pistol, for I want no quarrel with you."

"Do you swear not again to visit my home?" came the bold query, and the revolver still covered the gambler.

"I will not be forced into promises my boy."

"But you shall be, for Kent King I know you; ah, know that you deserted a young girl whom you pretended to marry, and killed her brother who sought to avenge her: yes, know that you are a card-sharp, cheat, and villain generally, and I say you shall not again visit my sister."

"Well, boy, you draw a high-colored picture of me, but it is false, and I decline to be bullied into pledges, and I won't."

"Hold! drop your hands, quick!"

"With a curse, the man obeyed, for the boy had seen the sudden effort to draw a weapon, and still held the vantage over him.

"Do you swear you will not again visit my home?" asked Billy Cody presently.

"A forced oath amounts to nothing."

"I'll risk it; do you swear?"

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Then I'll kill you, Kent King, as I would an Injun."

The man saw that the youth was determined,

and loving life, cared to take no chances, so he said, sullenly:

"Of course I swear under the circumstances."

"Very well; now go! but I swear to you, Kent King, if I see you at my home again, I will kill you. Go!"

The man scowled, but made no reply, and urged his horse forward; but suddenly his hand went to his hip, and wheeling quickly, there followed a flash and sharp report.

Not expecting treachery, Billy Cody had been taken by surprise, for he had returned his own pistol to his belt, and, though he saw the movement of the gambler, it was too late to draw again, and as King was a lightning drawer of a weapon and a dead shot, his bullet struck the human target at which it was aimed, for, with a spring from his saddle the boy fell heavily to the ground, while Little Gray bounded away, neighing wildly; and driving his spurs into the flanks of his horse, the assassin headed for the town at full speed, a grim smile upon his dark, handsome face.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITORS.

"THAT'S the good of being hard-headed."

The speaker was Billy Cody, who was sitting in the road, his hand caressing a wound in the top of his head, where the bullet of Kent King had cut its way under the scalp for a couple of inches and then sped on, the shock temporarily stunning the youth.

As soon as he recovered consciousness, Billy had realized what had taken place, and finding that he had received only a scalp wound, thought little of it, for he was not given to minding slight injuries, having received, young as he was, many a hard knock in his experience on the plains.

"Mother has always said I was hard-headed, and I'm right glad I am, or that Kent King would have caused mourning in the Cody family; and Little Gray has gone home to carry the news, so I must be on my way, or mother and the girls will be awful scared."

He arose to his feet, rubbed his head again to see that he was all right, and started on the back trail for home, ever and anon giving vent to his feelings by talking aloud, and what he said boded no good to Kent King.

He had not proceeded far before he met two of his sisters on horseback, riding rapidly and evidently frightened, while Little Gray, whose coming riderless home, had caused their anxiety, was trotting behind like the faithful horse he had proven himself, in spite of the bad reputation he had before he became the property of the youth.

Pulling his hat half round that he might hide the wound he had received, Buffalo Billy greeted his sisters, one of whom was Julia, and told them that he had been unexpectedly fired upon; but who had been the intended assassin he would not say, and making light of his injury he returned home, where his mother soon dressed the wound that had so nearly proven fatal to her only son.

"Jule, I would like to see you," said the youth, when his mother and other sister had left the room,

"Well, Billy, what is it?" and the maiden turned her handsome eyes upon her brother, though there was something in his tone as he spoke to her, that brought color into her cheeks, as though she anticipated what was coming.

"Jule, do you love Kent King?" came the abrupt question.

"Why Billy, what a question for you to ask."

"I mean it; do you love that man?"

"I hardly know; he is very handsome, talks well, and is different from the others I meet, and—"

"And what, Jule?"

"And says that he wants me to love him."

"As he has said to many another girl; I tell you, Jule, he is as treacherous as an Injun, and—"

"No, no, Billy, you must not speak so of Mr. King, for I believe him to be a good man," said the maiden, with some show of anger.

"And I know him to be a rascal, Jule; nay, listen, he shot me here," and he placed his hand upon his head.

"Kent King shot you, Billy?" and Julia Cody's face turned deadly pale.

"Yes; I have heard enough about him to make me know that he is a very bad man, and I made him swear not to come here again—"

"Not to come here again? oh, Billy!"

"I mean it, Jule, and he swore as I told him; but as he turned away he fired upon me without warning, and believes he has killed me."

"Oh, Billy!" was all the maiden could say, for suddenly was her idol shattered, as the fascinating gambler had already made an impression upon her young heart.

"Do you speak the truth, brother?" she suddenly asked.

"Yes, Jule; I would not tell a lie, even on Kent King."

"Then never again will I see him, Billy, and I thank you for saving me from a man who so willingly would aim at my brother's life," she said, frankly.

"You are a good girl, Jule, and I will prove to you that Kent King is all that is bad."

"But he goes away at daylight, Billy, to be gone nearly a year, for he guides a train of emigrants to the Far West."

"Kent King guides a train, Jule; what can you mean?"

"He says he is a plainsman, and Judge Hale has engaged him as guide for his train."

Billy was seemingly puzzled at this strange news, and seemed also pained, for boy that he was, already had he experienced a love-pang in his heart for one fair maiden.

It mattered not to him that she was two years his senior, he had loved her for several years, and it was her father, Judge Hale, who was going to push further West to find a home, accompanied by a number of other bold spirits, and of this train Kent King was to be the guide, and of course he would fall in love with sweet Mary Hale, for who could help it?

"Jule, when does the Hale train start West?" he asked, suddenly.

"Next Monday."

"Well, I'll take that chance of going West to

join Wild Bill, for I can go to bullwhacking again."

"No, no, Billy, you will not again face the terrible dangers of the plains!"

"Must, Jule, for if I loaf what'll keep the pot boiling? Yes, I'll go West with the Hale train."

"And Kent King?" asked Jule, earnestly.

"Oh! I'll have nothing to do with him, you may be certain, so long as he keeps away from you."

"But he may again seek your life, Billy."

"Guess not, sis; if he does, he'd better not."

"Oh brother! I fear trouble ahead between you and Kent King."

"Don't trouble, Jule; he knows me, and I know him; but do not speak of what I told you of his shooting me, and I'll not let him see that I remember it, unless he brings it up; but don't fret about me, for Wild Bill says I wasn't born to be drowned, hanged, or killed by an Injun."

"But Kent King is not an Indian."

"No, he is worse—ha! what is Watch barking so about I wonder?"

As Billy spoke, the faithful watch-dog gave a sudden yelp of pain and then all was silent for a moment.

"Quick! Jule, out with that light; now go up stairs, for there's somebody about that means mischief," cried Billy, and quickly his sister obeyed, and they were in total darkness; but from the head of the stairway was heard his mother's voice:

"Billy, do not go out, for there are half a dozen men at the door."

"I'll be cautious, mother; now, Jule, run upstairs," said the brave boy.

"No, Billy, I will not leave you, for—"

"For what, Jule?" he asked, as his sister paused.

"For I feel that Kent King has come for me, as he swore to-day I should marry him, if he had to drag me from my home."

"He'll have a lively time doing it; now I am ready," and Billy took his stand by the door, a revolver in each hand, while without were heard voices conversing in a low tone that boded evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT HOME TO FRIENDS OR FOES.

"HERE, Jule, you answer them, if they knock," ordered Billy Cody in a whisper, and the brave girl took her stand at the side of her brother, just as a loud knocking was heard upon the door.

"Who is there?" asked the maiden calmly.

"We are neighbors, Widow Cody, come over to see if we can serve you, having heard your son Billy was killed this afternoon," said a voice in a kindly tone, which caused Mrs. Cody to immediately call down-stairs:

"Let them in, Billy, for it was kind of them to come over, and I will make them some coffee."

"It was not *kind* of them, mother; they are *not* neighbors, and I'll see that they get *coffins* instead of *coffee*, if they attempt to come in,"

whispered back the boy, while his sister said aloud and in a mock sad tone:

"Billy was shot, but he needs no aid."

"That's right, Jule; let 'em think I've cashed in my chips, and then they'll show their hand and I'll trump it with sixes," whispered Billy in a tone of real glee, for he was charmed at the surprise he meditated.

"Waal, we comed over to help yer, an' it's only doin' ther perlite ter ax us in," said a gruff voice.

"These are too dangerous times to open our doors to strangers at midnight," responded Jule, firmly.

"But we is friends, and we will come in," came gruffly from without.

"You will find us prepared to greet either friends or foes," was the fearless response of Jule.

"Then, as you've refused our friendship, you'll find us foes," said the first speaker, and at once heavy blows were struck upon the door, causing it to bend inward under their force.

"Hold! I warn you off!" cried Jule, in a stern tone, between the blows, while Billy stood by in raptures at the surprise he would give the marauders with his "hands full of trumps," as he expressed it, for Buffalo Billy, boy though he was, had been enough among the gamblers of the border to know all their professional terms.

Louder and louder came the blows, heavier and heavier, until the stout bolt at last gave way and the head and shoulders of a burly ruffian appeared in the open space.

"Now it's my play," was the boy's cool remark, and at the flash of his pistol the bold intruder fell dead.

But another sprung into his place to likewise fall a corpse across the threshold.

This summary mode of greeting foes caused the others to retreat rapidly to a corner of the house, where a stern voice was heard urging the others on.

"Quick, Jule, take my rifle and run up to the east window and let 'em have it," cried Billy, and instantly his sister obeyed, for a moment after there came a ringing report from above, and a shriek and running feet below, while a loud voice cried:

"Back here, you cowards! the boy is dead, and will you allow an old woman and her girls to beat you off?"

"Tain't healthy here, cap'n, an' I doesn't want ter catch ther lead fever t'other boys hes died with," answered a voice from under the house.

Then down through the flooring went a shot, and an oath and scuffling followed, and then running feet were heard, as the man sought shelter elsewhere, with a rifle-shot from Jule at the upper windows flying in pursuit of him.

"Set the cursed house on fire!" then, commanded the same stern voice.

"My rifle here, quick, Jule!" and Billy, with the recklessness of boyhood and his nature, sprung out of the door and began to fire in the direction of the thicket where the marauders had taken refuge.

Instantly a general stampede took place,

while one voice cried out in a tone of horror, as the flashes of the rifle showed who was firing it:

"The boy, by Heaven! and not dead!"

Then away fled the band, and Billy quietly dragged the two bodies in the house, and his mother and sisters came down-stairs, bringing lights with them.

"My brave boy, from what have you not saved us!" said widow Cody.

"Can't tell, mother, till I see who they are—aha! they are masked, and, I know them now," and he took the masks from their faces.

"And who are they?" asked his mother and sisters in a breath.

"Some of the gang in Leavenworth known as the Satan's Pets; but they were not acting on their own account, I guess," and the boy glanced quickly toward his sister Jule, who understood his look, and turned deadly pale, for she read what was in his thoughts regarding Kent King.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO FROM THIRTEEN.

WHEN the news went into Leavenworth, of the dastardly attack upon the home of widow Cody, it was set down to the act of a gang of ruffians who had lately been committing depredations in the neighborhood, and the Vigilantes assembled to be ready for work should the perpetrators be discovered.

Of course the affair added to the fame of young Cody, and he became a hero in the eyes of men, as well as in the estimation of the country, for, though a boy in years, he was known to be one that could render a good account of himself in any affair where nerve and strength were concerned.

Whatever the settlers thought of the attack on the Cody farm, Buffalo Billy had his own opinion on the subject, and in it his sister Jule concurred after the two had had a talk upon the subject, but the decision they arrived at was to remain a secret between them.

The night before the Hale train, as it was called, was to start for the Far West, Billy Cody rode into Leavenworth, and with the easy devil-me-care air that characterized him, sauntered along the streets, nodding pleasantly to those whom he knew, or stopping for a chat with some recently returned silver miner, Californian, bullwhacker or scout, to glean what ideas he could of the latest news from the border.

Of his intention to go with the Hale train he had said nothing to any one excepting his sister Jule; but now, meeting several men who had joined the party, he casually asked if they had engaged a guide.

"Yes, Billy; ther jedge seems set on thet velvet-faced card-sharp, Kent King, bein' the path-finder inter ther wilderness o' red-skins, an' thar's no 'busin' his mind out o' it; but why he sh'u'd want him, I dunno," answered Bullwhip Ben, the Prince of Bullwhackers, while a long-legged Yankee, whose peculiar forte for striking a bargain under any and all circumstances, had gained him the name of "Old Negotiate," put in:

"I guesses he don't know ther Republican from ther Platte, an' ef he don't lead us a thou-

sand miles off ther trail, I'll giv' yer my pony, Billy, if you'll giv' me yourn."

"I think too much of Little Gray, Negotiate, to risk him on the result; but I have heard that King has spent much time upon the border, and was once in the border army. Anyhow, there will be somebody along who knows the trail if he don't," averred Billy Cody.

"I'll negotiate my bullwhip ag'in' yer saddle, Billy, thet he spends more time pourin' honey inter ther ear o' pretty Mary Hale, then he does lookin' fer ther trail, fer he's softy on that gal, an' they does say as how ther jedge wants 'em ter splice."

Billy's face grew dark at this, but he made no reply and passed on to the "Star of Empire," where the prairie men of all descriptions gathered day and night, to pass the time in conversation, gambling, drinking and any other amusement that suited their humor.

A score of voices greeted young Cody on his arrival, for he was universally popular, and as many invitations were given him to:

"Step up an' hev suthin', Billy?"

"Moisten yer coppers, Boy Pard?"

"Sling tanglefoot, youngster?"

"Come p'izen yerself with corn-juice?"

But to all these pressing invitations Billy Cody returned the answer:

"No, thank you, pard, I'm too young a child yet to mix drinks."

"Why, what has yer been drinkin', boy?" asked one.

"Milk!"

"Oh! you isn't weaned yet!" said a whisky sot, insolently.

"No, and I don't want to be, if I had to carry a sign like you have on your face."

"What's 'er matter with my face, boy?" and the loafer put his hand caressingly upon his whisky-tinted visage.

"Yer nose is as red as a beet," cried one.

"He is a beat; a dead beat, and the largest I ever saw cultivated in Kansas soil," responded Billy, and in the laugh that followed at the loafer's expense, Billy glided into the large social hall, where he suddenly came upon Kent King, rigged out in a new suit of buckskin, and armed to the teeth.

"Well, King, you go West to-morrow, I hear?" said the boy, addressing the gambler as though nothing had occurred between them of an unpleasant nature.

At the sound of his voice Kent King wheeled quickly round, and his hand involuntarily fell upon the revolver on his hip; but seeing that the boy made no sign of hostility, and showed no anger toward him, he answered, pleasantly:

"Yes, Billy, and per force of circumstances, you see, I will have to keep away from your home. Wish you could go along, too, as assistant guide."

"Thank you! I intend returning West soon; in fact I am only waiting for the arrival of a cousin of mine, who is to work the farm, before I go, as I do not wish to leave my mother and sisters unprotected, as you know a band of devils came down upon us the other night."

"So I learned, and that the two you killed belonged to Leavenworth. You were lucky, Billy, to get rid of them; but I am going in to

try my luck, as the lamps are lighted now. Will you come along?"

"Yes," and Buffalo Billy followed Kent King into a large room, toward which a tide of humanity was setting, for it was the Gamblers' Paradise, as it was called, though Purgatory would have been a more appropriate name for it.

Already had a number of men seated themselves at the tables, at one of which Kent King soon settled himself, and the different games began, Buffalo Billy watching with considerable interest the luck and misfortune of the players, and sauntering from table to table.

Presently, seeing that Kent King was steadily winning, he walked over to another table, around which stood a crowd watching the playing of two men, whose recklessly large stakes had driven other players away.

As he walked up a sudden scene of excitement occurred, and one of the players cried, in an angry tone:

"Pard, you is a durned cheat, an' a keerd sharp are no more 'n a thief."

"This to me, curse you!" came in the stern tones of the other man, and the two players were on their feet in an instant, while their hands sought for weapons.

Whether one had suspected trouble or not none knew; but certain it is a revolver appeared with marvelous quickness, the flash and report followed, and across the table dropped one of the players—the one who had accused the other of cheating.

"Who are the stiff? Who knows him?"

"Hain't he no friends fer ter keep the fun movin'?"

"Pard, wasn't yer a leetle too quick on ther draw?"

Such were the remarks that went round, while Buffalo Billy, who had caught sight of the dead man's face, stepped quickly forward, and turning the body over looked into the open, staring eyes, not set in death.

"I know him; his name is Dan Beckett, and he was a Colorado miner," announced the boy, and he glanced over to where his murderer stood, and instantly recognized him, for he cried:

"Why, Carl Moran! I thought you were Dan's pard!"

"Ah! Buffalo Billy, my Boy Guide, is it you?" and with a revolver in his hand, as though expecting to be called to account, Carl Moran stepped toward the youth, who said, firmly:

"No, Moran, I can't take your hand, if, as they say you shot your pard down without warning."

An angry look came into the face of Carl Moran, but checking it, he said:

"He was my pard, Billy, until of late he has been seeking trouble with me for some cause, and he accused me of cheating, and I couldn't stand that. He died because I pulled the quickest. Come, boy, I'm glad to see you again, and here's dust to bury poor Dan decently," and throwing a small bag of gold onto the table Carl Moran turned away, while Buffalo Billy gave the body of the silver miner to some one, who promised it a decent burial, and leaving the Star of Empire, mounted his horse and

rode slowly homeward, murmuring over and over again, and evidently with deeper thoughts behind the short utterance:

"Two from thirteen, leave eleven."

CHAPTER X.

THE MIDNIGHT MYSTERY.

THE Hale emigrant train had been gone several days, before Buffalo Billy told his mother that it was his intention to overtake it, and continue on in company to the far West, and again join Wild Bill, whom he looked upon as a kind of elder brother, though the noted plainsman treated the boy more like a son than anything else.

Of course it was with great regret that Widow Cody bade her son farewell, for she fondly hoped that he could be lured from his love of wild life; but Billy told her he would again return with a handsome sum of money, with which to make the family comfortable, and his cousin having come to cultivate the farm on shares, he lost no time in striking the trail of the train.

Continuing along at an easy gait, he hoped to overtake it before reaching the Republican River, where they would either continue on toward the Platte, or keep the straight trail to Denver, in the vicinity of which place it was the intention of Judge Hale to form his settlement.

Though he and Kent King had apparently "buried the hatchet," the boy knew that the man wanted him out of the way, and was only friendly toward him to lull suspicion, while for the gambler, who had suddenly turned guide, Billy felt now an intense hatred, and intended to keep an eye on him until the intended settlement was reached, even should he miss Wild Bill and have to hire out as bullwhacker to some other party to get East once more.

One evening, an hour before sunset, when within about forty miles of the Republican, Buffalo Billy saw a storm arising and sought shelter in a thicket of cottonwoods, where he quickly erected a "wicky-up," with the aid of the hatchet he always had hanging to his saddle.

Into this shelter Little Gray and his rider found refuge, and when the storm had blown over, the evening meal of game, crackers and coffee was enjoyed by the youth as much as though served at home.

Rolling himself in his blanket, after giving Little Gray a good length of the lariat to feed by, Buffalo Billy sought sleep, unawed by his loneliness and the danger to which he was exposed.

He was awakened by feeling something warm against his cheek, which he knew was Little Gray.

"There's something up; what is it, old horse?" he said, in a low tone, well knowing that Little Gray was a faithful guardian at night.

Listening a moment, he heard voices in conversation, and hoof-strokes evidently approaching the timber where he had sought shelter.

Instantly he threw his saddle on Little Gray, coiled his lariat and awaited in silence the comers, be they friends or foes.

Reaching the timber they dismounted, three

in number, and prepared to camp; but, though Billy knew by their conversation that they were white men, he dare not make his presence known, for he might run afoul of road-agents, horse-thieves, or men who would be only too willing to try conclusions with him for Little Gray and his arms.

"This place is hardly large enough for two parties who don't know each other, little horse, so I guess we'll seek other quarters for the balance of the night," said the boy, and he cautiously left the thicket, the faithful animal following closely behind him, and stepping as noiselessly as a deer, seemingly appreciating the danger.

A few hundred yards distant was another thicket, which the youth had noticed, and in this he took refuge, and soon made himself as comfortable as the wet leaves and dismal place would admit.

"I wonder if I couldn't bargain with them for my dry wicky-up, Gray? I guess if Old Negotiate was here he could arrange it; but now let us go to sleep, for it's a long ride we have to-morrow," and with an affectionate caress to his horse Billy again rolled himself in his blankets and sought rest.

How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by two shots fired in quick succession.

Springing to his feet he glanced in the direction of the timber where he had first sought refuge, and then came to his ears:

"Hold, pard! yer isn't gone mad to shoot yer friends, has yer— Oh!"

The last word rung out loud, and the sound was drowned in the crack of a revolver, and then all was still.

"This is worse than cats on a moonlight night, Gray; there's trouble yonder; yet, as it's not our funeral, guess we won't attend," muttered the youth, as he again threw the saddle on Little Gray, and awaited new development.

"Gray, we are losing rest this night, but it can't be helped," and while his horse went on grazing, indifferent as to what had occurred over in the motte near by, Billy sat down to await coming events.

Feeling drowsy he sunk to sleep, and only awoke with the dawn.

Then he awaited until sunrise, and seeing no sign of life in the motte, mounted Gray and cautiously approached the thicket.

As he drew nearer he heard a whining, snarling sound, that told him that the living had gone whoever they were, and that the dead remained as the food for wolves.

Dashing into the timber he scattered the fighting, ravenous animals with a couple of shots and beheld before him a sickening sight.

At his feet, before a fire slowly dying away, lay two bodies, upon which the wolves had already begun their feast, and in the white, bearded faces turned up to him he recognized two of the Silver Miners he had guided across the plains!

Throwing himself from his horse he bent over one of them, and cried out quickly:

"It is Hank Hayes! poor fellow, to die thus; and he was shot twice, so I know that he it was I heard to speak last night to the one who

killed him. And there stand their horses, but he who did the deed has gone. Poor fellows! The wolves shall not pick your bones, for I will bury you," and the noble-hearted boy set about his sad task, and beneath a tall sycamore the miners found a last resting-place, while in the bark of the tree, with his keen knife, Buffalo Billy cut the following inscription:

"HANK HAYES
AND
BUCK GRANGER,
SILVER MINERS OF COLORADO.

Killed by a Treacherous Pard.

FOUR FROM THIRTEEN LEAVE NINE."

CHAPTER XI.

A SECRET AND A MYSTERY.

THE night following the tragedy in the motte as Buffalo Billy was riding slowly along, the two horses of the murdered miners following him, he suddenly sighted ahead the glow of camp-fires, and soon after rode into camp, where he was welcomed with a general shout of rejoicing, for all who did not know the young bullwhacker, had heard of his many daring exploits.

"Well, Billy, what news do you bring?" asked Judge Hale, as he greeted the boy.

"Nothing of importance happened at Leavenworth before I left, but I found two dead men in a motte back on the trail, and their murderer has escaped; but here are their horses. Have you had anybody join the train, sir?"

"Not since we left, Billy; but come up to my lay-out, for Mary will be glad to see you, and you will find there your old friend King, who you know is our guide."

Billy nodded assent and followed the judge, an honest-faced old man of fifty-five, to his tent, before which sat Mary Hale, and Kent King, watching a negress prepare supper, which was certainly most tempting, consisting as it did of coffee, buffalo-steaks, wild turkey, potatoes and corn-cakes.

Kent King's face flushed as the youth appeared, and for that matter so did Mary Hale's, but with far different motives.

The maiden, however, who was a handsome girl of eighteen, warmly extended her hand in greeting, and said with marked emphasis:

"Billy, I am so glad you have come! you will remain of course?"

"Of course he will, for I feel he has decided to accept my offer to make him assistant guide to the train, eh Billy?" broke in Kent King.

"I am bound West to rejoin my old pard, Wild Bill, and his boys; but if I can be of service I will gladly lend a hand, a rifle, or a revolver."

"You shall be well paid for your services."

"I neither ask, or will accept pay, Kent King, for serving Judge Hale and his party," quickly answered the youth, and turning to the judge, he asked:

"How many people, sir?"

"Ninety—all told, with twenty-three fighting men; then we have twenty wagons, two ambulances and my carriage, which make up a

respectable show to scare off prowling bands of Indians or outlaws."

"And you head along the Republican to the Arickaree, I suppose, sir?"

"I have the trail I intend to follow already laid out, Master Cody," answered King, with a slight show of anger; but the youth answered coolly:

"That may be, but as it has certainly been some time since you were West, and there are localities now to be avoided, and I know them, I would like to make them known to you."

"When at fault I will call on you, Cody; but this train has come prepared for every emergency that might arise, I can assure you, and I shall not lead it into danger."

"Come, Susan says supper is ready, and I am almost starved; come, father, Mr. King and Billy," said Mary Hale, breaking in upon what she thought was tending toward trouble, for the day the train departed she had received a letter from Buffalo Billy, sent by his sister Jule, warning her against the man who was to be their guide, and she felt, therefore, that there could be no friendship between the two.

"And you'll join our mess, Billy?" said the judge.

"Thank you, sir; but I guess I'd better pard in with some of the boys."

"No; you are my guest, Billy, and you can pay your board by keeping us in game."

"All right, judge," returned the boy, and the four sat down to supper, which they ate with a relish that only life on the prairie can give.

That night Mary Hale, when the judge and Kent King had gone on a circuit around the camp, said suddenly to the youth, who sat near her dreamily gazing into the log fire:

"Billy, have you any cause to doubt Kent King?"

"Yes."

"Then it was not jealousy, or suspicion, that made you write to me not to trust him?"

"No."

"Will you not say more than yes and no?"

"What must I say?"

"Tell me why you suspect Kent King."

"I don't suspect him; I know him to be a—I mean a dreadful rascal, though the other word would have suited him best."

"What do you know of him?"

"He asked Jule to marry him."

"Billy, do you tell me the truth?" and the girl laid her hand on his shoulder and looked squarely into his face.

"Mary, I humbug the boys sometimes for fun, for a story goes for truth mighty often out here; but I never told you a falsehood in my life, for you remember when we were at school together, and I told Steve Govan if he didn't quit teasing you I would whip him, I kept my word."

"Indeed, you nearly killed him, Billy; but I am not your sweetheart now," and she cast a sly look at the boy, who frankly answered:

"Oh! I haven't changed, Mary, for I am just as dead in love as ever; but changes have come, for I am still a boy, and a rough one, too, I guess, while you are a woman, and have forgotten your old playmate."

"No, no, you wrong me, Billy, for I can never forget our school days, or how kind you have ever been to me; but things have changed since then, Billy, for I am a woman now, and I wish to Heaven I was not, for my father wishes me to marry Kent King."

"You'll never do it, Mary."

"I must! Oh! that I could escape it, but I cannot, for father has promised him that I shall be his wife."

"And you don't love him, do you?"

"No, and yet he seems to fascinate me."

"The same as he did Jule; it's the snake fascinating the bird, Mary; but why don't you give him up as Jule did?"

"I dare not, Billy."

"Why?"

The question came bluntly, and the maiden did not at once reply, and again he asked:

"Why?"

"I will trust you with my secret, Billy; but after that we must not be seen together, for, young as you are, I saw to-night that you made Kent King jealous, and I confess that I fear him."

"He had better not attempt any capers, Mary, or I'll make him worse than jealous; but what were you going to tell me?"

After a moment of silence, Mary Hale said:

"Billy, I am confident that father and Kent King have met before—that is before they met on the border, for I overheard a conversation between them once, and, I regret to say it, but I believe there is a secret between them, and one which my father would not have known, and hence the power held over him."

"It must be very serious, Mary, for your father to be forced to give you to a man he does not like; but, with this to work on, I will keep my eye on Kent King, and, if you do not love him, you shall not marry him; if you do, I've got nothing to say."

"Oh Billy, how good you are! Now I feel brave as you are my friend, and with the train; before this I have all along had a presentiment of coming evil."

"Don't borrow trouble, Mary. Now good-night, for I will take a little circuit around camp, as we are getting into a neighborhood where we must keep our eyes open," and shouldering his rifle Buffalo Billy took his departure from the camp-fire, and passing out through the lines walked in the direction of a small thicket, a short distance away.

Suddenly he came upon two persons, one of whom he recognized as Kent King, and believing the other to be the judge, he approached them.

That he surprised the guide was evident, and his companion he did not know, and Billy felt certain that Kent King was playing some game of deviltry, with the train as a foundation to work upon.

CHAPTER XII.

KENT KING SHOWS HIS HAND.

STEADILY westward the train held on its way from sunrise to sunset, and around the camp-fires at night gathered the settlers, indulging in songs and pleasant chats, until fatigued nature

urged them to seek repose for the early morning start.

From the day of his coming, Buffalo Billy had been invaluable, for he was the life of the company, the elder people admiring him greatly, and the younger ones having him for their beau-ideal of a brave boy-hero.

A skilled hunter, he kept every mess supplied with game of all kinds, and his services as a guide Kent King soon found to be indispensable, and though holding on a given course, he allowed the boy to select the routes for each day.

Though apparently with nothing to trouble him, Billy Cody was all the time watching the gambler closely, and the more he saw of him, the more he was convinced that there was something wrong brewing, and this suspicion was held by pretty Mary Hale, and the two often talked the matter over, of how often the guide left the train on a pretended hunt, but always returned without success, and then the many secret interviews which he and the judge held together.

One afternoon, when the train had halted rather earlier than usual on the banks of a pleasant stream, Kent King sought the "lay-out" of the judge, and called to Mary, who was in her tent.

"Well, Mr. King, how can I serve you?" she asked quietly.

"Sit down, Mary, for I have something to say to you," and he placed a camp-chair for her, while he remained standing.

"Mary, you know that your father has promised you to me for my wife?"

"Yes, as well as I know that I was not consulted in the matter, Mr. King."

"Consult now your heart, Mary, and give me my answer," he said, earnestly.

"I have but one answer, sir; I would never marry a man I did not love."

He started, and turning his handsome eyes upon her said with deep feeling:

"And you do not love me, Mary?"

"I do not."

"You will change."

"No."

"You must do so, for you are to be my wife," he said firmly.

"Ha! do you intend to force me to give my hand where my heart cannot go with it?"

"Yes, if you will not willingly become my wife, you must unwillingly be made such."

"Never! you are insulting, Kent King, and I will speak to my father of your insolence," she said haughtily.

But the man only smiled, and after a moment replied:

"Your father will side with me, Miss Hale."

"And will he so far forget his self-respect and love for his only child, as to make me marry a man I now—yes, I will say it—fairly detest?"

"Ha! ha! ha! my beauty! Your detestation may as well turn to admiration, for your father and myself have agreed that you are to be Mrs. Kent King, and that right soon, as Parson Miller is willing to marry us, whenever I say the word."

"Parson Miller, I have never liked, sir; but, as a man of God, he cannot lend himself to crime."

"Oh no; he will simply marry a wayward girl, at her father's request, to a man who loves her devotedly, and will make her a good husband."

"But I will cry out against this crime being done; to all in the train will I beg for aid."

"Bah! Your father's will is supreme here, girl, and no one will gainsay what he wishes done, and they will merely look upon your protestations as maidenly caprice."

"Oh, Heaven have mercy! Is there no one I can call upon?" cried the now thoroughly frightened and wretched girl.

"You can while Billy Cody's around, Mary," and the boy stepped from behind the tent, and with his rifle lying across his arm, as if by accident, but pointing straight at Kent King.

"Oh Billy! my father and all have deserted me," cried Mary springing toward him.

"I'm around yet, Mary; so don't get blue, for, if I am a boy, I am that man's master," was the cool remark of the youth, as he confronted the guide.

"Leave here, boy, or I'll make this camp too hot for you!" fairly shouted Kent King.

"I like it hot, Kent King, so set your fire a-going."

"Billy! Billy, be careful, for he means you no good," warned Mary with great agitation.

"That makes us even, for it's just what I mean him, if he attempts any high hand business with you. I threatened to kill him about Jule, and as Old Negotiate says, I'll bet him an Injun against a nigger, that I bury him yet."

"Beware of threats, boy, or you'll be left alone here on the prairie like a wolf," said the guide, not daring to move, as he saw that the boy had the drop on him with his rifle, though apparently not intending it.

"And I'm wolf enough to find my way out of the wilderness, Kent King, and track you to doom."

"Oh! here comes father! Now, Kent King, I'll see if you have spoken the truth, when you say he will *force* me to marry you against my will," and she sprung toward the judge, who just then approached, and continued earnestly:

"Father, this man says that I am to marry him; have you so told him?"

Judge Hale certainly looked deeply worried, for his face was pale and his brow clouded; but after glancing at the guide he said, in a low tone:

"Mr. King loves you, Mary, and he is certainly a man that you cannot but admire—"

"I hate him—fear him—loathe him!"

"Tut! tut! my child, you are silly."

"I am sensible. Oh, father! why is it you wish to sacrifice me to that evil man?"

"Miss Hale is complimentary," sneered the guide.

"She knows you," coolly said Buffalo Billy.

"Is it a sacrifice for a young girl to marry a man of means, a gentleman and one who has done much for her father, and loves her devotedly?" interposed the judge, evidently with a painful effort.

"He is a gambler, an adventurer, and no gentleman would force a girl to be his wife."

"Don't use dictionary terms, Mary; he's a black-leg, a blackguard and a black-hearted scamp," added Buffalo Billy, bringing his rifle closer to the guide's heart.

"You and I shall have a settlement, boy, which you won't like."

"Oh, I like settlements; it's when people won't settle that bothers me."

"Billy, you should not anger Mr. King," said the judge, reproachfully.

"The King pin of rascals deserves all I can say, judge; why, the parson couldn't say a kind word over the grave of such a fellow."

"Cody, I must insist that you do not speak so."

"Then let him leave Mary alone, for I have promised to protect her."

"But I, her father, am here to do that, sir."

"But you don't do it."

"I'll see to that."

"So will I, judge, for you can't know that man if you want Mary to marry him," boldly persisted Buffalo Billy.

"I have given my promise, and my daughter must obey me, for I owe to Mr. King more than I can ever repay," and the face of Judge Hale flushed as though from shame at some bygone recollection.

"Ah! I'm one to be sacrificed, father, to square your debt of gratitude to Mr. King, for some service he has rendered you," remarked Mary, with biting sarcasm.

"The judge is right. In the past—for we have known each other for years—it was in my power to save him from trouble, and he appreciates it, and knowing my character he has promised me his daughter's hand, and I now say that in one week she is to be my wife. Am I right judge?" and Kent King turned a look upon the judge, that seemed to force from his lips the word of reply:

"Yes."

"Enough! now we understand each other, Mary; and you, sir, shall leave this train with the rise of the sun, and if you show your face in it again while on the march, you shall be shot down as would be an outlaw or an Indian," and the guide turned two burning eyes on Buffalo Billy, who answered, with the most provoking impudence:

"Is that so, Gambler King?"

"Try, it and you'll find out."

"You are such a liar, King, I'll put you to the test; but, let me tell you, whether I go or stay, the night you make Mary Hale your wife, I'll make her a widow before the 'joined together' and 'put asunder' are cold on the parson's lips," and shouldering his rifle, Buffalo Billy strode away from the spot, directing his steps in the direction of the other camp-fires.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PLOTTERS.

WHEN Buffalo Billy walked in among the camp-fires, around which the emigrants were busy preparing their evening meal, he beckoned to Old Negotiate, who had joined the train as teamster, to follow him, and the two

soon stood together in the shadow of a clump of box-elder bushes.

"Negotiate, old man, there's trouble in camp," remarked Billy.

"I'mbettin' a chaw o' terbacca, Billy, ag'in' yer rifle, thar is ef you say so."

"I do say so, and more, that Kent King is at the bottom of it."

"I'll negotiate liberal bets on that, Billy boy."

"He intends to force Mary Hale to marry him."

"Not ag'in' her will, Billy; or I'll bet my bull-whip ag'in' his scalp he don't do it, ef I'm 'round."

"I knew you would say so, old man; but he says that Parson Miller will marry them one week from to-day."

"Waal he c'u'd do it prime ef any one c'u'd, fer he's a Gospil sharp from Sharpsville, an' he's hot on Scriptur'."

"But he must not do the job."

"Waal, ef you says not, boy, I'mbettin' my pipe ag'in' his Bible he don't."

"I do say so, old man."

"You wouldn't have a row with ther parson, Billy, or you'd lose yer chance o' Heavin when the Dealer above calls in yer chips fer cashin'."

"I don't want a row with the parson, old man, though I don't like him, as I think he is all preach and no practice; but I'll give him a call to the mourner's bench if he attempts to aid in wronging Mary."

"It's bad luck, Billy, to kill a cat, cuss a preacher, or strike a woman."

"When a minister or a woman forget who or what they are, they forfeit respect."

"And ther cat, Billy?"

"Choke the cat!"

"So I say, Billy; but I'll negotiate yer mother's ole brindle tabby ag'in' your pony, ther parson does as Kent King tells him."

"So I believe, and I wish you to help me prevent it."

"But how kin we, Billy?"

"Ah! I have it. King has ordered me from camp, and if I return he says he will kill me."

"Waal that is interestin', boy."

"Now at dawn I intend to go, and, as Parson Miller is very fond of hunting—"

"Yas, he's ther best hunter I ever see, but he don't never find no game."

"Well, I'll show him where there's game for I want you to ask the parson to go on a day's hunt with you; then drop back a few miles, and I will join you—"

"I hopes yer isn't goin' ter call in his chips, Billy."

"No, I'm no assassin, old man; but I'll join you and will propose a wide circuit with

the parson, while you are to go in another direction and meet us at a given point; but don't you meet us."

"Waal."

"Strike for the train and report the parson lost."

"Waal, Billy! talk clean fer I is as dumb as a mule."

"I'll get lost, too, and it will take us more than a week to find the train—"

"Aha! Oh Billy, you is a boss boy; I sees, I sees now; without a parson ther can't be no splicin' in matrimony."

"You are right; we will run across some herders going south after cattle, and I know them all, and will get them to join the train with me, and then Kent King will continue on a trip with them, and I'll guide the party on to Denver."

"An' ther jedge?"

"Oh! he'll be glad to get rid of King, I feel certain, though, for some reason, he dare not say so; now, old man, go back to camp, and remember the hunt with the parson tomorrow."

"I'll be thar, fer I'll chin him to-night, an' I'll lie so about game, he'll pray fer mornin' ter come; oh Lordy, Billy, what a good boy you'll hev ter be, while ther parson is with yer, fer yer'll hev grace over tough buff'ler steaks that'll make 'em tender, an' yer'll hev ter say yer leetle

"Now I lay mes'

every night; Billy, Billy, I fear you'll yet tarn Gospil sharp yerself."

"I'll not be a deceitful one if I do. Now good-night," and Buffalo Billy separated from Old Negotiate, and making a circuit again reached camp, inwardly rejoicing over his plot to capture a parson to prevent a wedding.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOST AND FOUND.

TRUE to his promise, Old Negotiate sought Parson Miller—a long-legged, cadaverous-faced individual, with a look as if ice-cream would not melt in his mouth, and told him he was going on a hunt the following morning, adding:

"Now, my Pard o' Piety, ef you'd like ter kill a buff'ler as is a buff'ler, you jist go with me in ther mornin' an' I'll bet yer ther buff'ler yer kill ag'in' yer horse, that we'll bring back more game then we kin carry."

"Brother Negotiate, for not knowing the Christian name given thee by thy sponsors in baptism, I must call thee that by which thou art known in this howling wilderness, I will be more than glad to go hunting in the morning, though it seemeth wrong to slay the innocent buffalo and feathered fowl, to

cater to our appetites," answered the parson, with a pious roll of his eyes.

"Yer'd be a durned fool ef yer didn't eat, parson; but we'll start early, so chin yer pra'ers durin' the night, so as not ter lose time."

And so it was arranged that the parson and Old Negotiate should start at an early hour on a hunt, and they were up with the dawn and ready as the train pulled out for the day's march.

But somehow the promised luck did not come to them, and it was with real pleasure, after several hours of hard riding, the parson suddenly cried:

"Why, there is our young brother, William Frederick Cody!"

"It's ther boy, or I are a liar, pard—I mean parson; I think he rode out o' camp last night, fer he hed a few words with Kent King, I heerd."

"He seemeth a young brother of too high mettle; now brother King is—"

"A durned fool an' a rascal," put in Negotiate, bluntly; and the parson rolled his eyes in holy horror and said, in his drawling tones:

"He appeareth to me like a man of reason and piety, and I rejoice that he is to marry a damsel like our sweet sister Mary."

Old Negotiate muttered something like an oath, and which was not at all complimentary to the parson, and then cried aloud, as Buffalo Billy came nearer, Little Gray being in an easy gallop:

"Hullo, Billy! You is the man we want, for we can't find no game, though ther parson hes prayed diligent fer a buff'lo or jack-rabbit ter spring up."

"You are off the trail, old man, and don't hunt right," declared Billy, giving Little Gray a jerk for being viciously disposed toward the parson's mule, and which caused Old Negotiate to innocently say:

"Now look at that thar horse; he knows like a human, parson, that you an' yer mule hain't the same breed as ther rest o' us, seein' as you is a Gospil-grinder, an' yer animal is nuther a horse or a mule; but, boy, how w'u'd yer do ef yer wanted game?"

"Find it."

"Ah! then thou knowest where the wild beasts of the field and birds of the air lurketh and haveth their lair, my young brother?"

"I do, parson, and if you will go with me, and let Old Negotiate bear away to the left, we'll find all the game you can shoot."

"I are willin', Billy boy, an' ef we don't meet on the trail ahead, we will in camp; don't let ther parson git hurt, boy, or ye'll hev no one ter bury yer when yer is called in; but I'll bet yer ther game I slays ag'in'

what yer does that I gets ther most," and Old Negotiate waved his hand, and started off to the southwest, while Buffalo Billy and the parson bore away in a northwesterly direction, the latter charmed to be hunting with a youth whom he knew always brought in game.

A ride of a few miles and the keen eyes of the youth sighted a herd of buffalo ahead, and instantly he gave chase, followed by Parson Miller on his mule, which was certainly a very fine animal and remarkably swift of foot.

It was a long run after the herd, but after a while the parson was elated beyond measure by bringing down a buffalo bull with his old musket, a relic of the war of 1812, that kicked the shooter off his mule when he discharged it, causing him to utter something strangely like an oath as he struck *terra firma*, the boy thought.

To hide his laughter from the unfortunate parson, Buffalo Billy set off in chase of the mule, and soon skillfully lassoed him and returned him to his owner, remarking, quietly:

"The gun kicks as hard as the mule, parson."

"Trifle not, rash youth, with the heels of Goliath."

"You bet I don't, parson, nor with your old blunderbuss, either; but you got your buffalo."

"I did," and the parson surveyed the dead animal, and at the same time rubbed his shoulder, little dreaming that some of the bad boys in camp had thrown into the musket a few extra loads when they knew its sanctimonious owner was going on a hunt.

Having cut off some of the choicest parts of the buffalo, the two mounted and started in what the parson supposed was the direction of the trail; but soon a band of elk were sighted, and Billy skillfully brought down one at long range, and it furnished a supply of juicy meat that the preacher devoured with hungry eyes.

A couple of turkeys, found in the bottom land of a small creek, and a prairie chicken killed by Billy with his revolver, satisfied the parson with the day's sport, and again he urged starting for the train, as night was coming on, and with it a storm.

But darkness came on rapidly, and, seeing that they would be caught by the storm, Billy Cody urged that they seek refuge in a piece of timber land, which his companion reluctantly consented to do, and in a short time the youth had thrown up a comparatively comfortable wicky-up and built a blazing fire.

"Well, parson, we are in for it all night," announced Buffalo Billy, gayly, as, having

lariated Little Gray and Goliath out to feed on the juicy grass, he was seated in the wicky-up cooking their supper, the parson looking dolefully on.

"It seemeth so, my young friend; but thy skill hath made a famous retreat for us, and the scent of these viands our hunters' craft hath provided, will not make it unpleasant, unless the red-men of the forest should come upon us unawares like a wolf in the night."

"Oh, Little Gray is as good as a watchdog, and can smell an Injun half a mile; besides, they'll lay low a night like this; but come, parson, here is a buffalo-steak for you, and just see how this turkey is cooked, so pitch in, for the smell of this coffee makes me hungry."

The parson needed no second invitation, but quickly said grace and "pitched in" with a gusto that would have driven a dyspeptic mad with envy.

By the time the supper was finished the storm broke in fury upon them, driving Little Gray and Goliath, who had made friends, to the lee of the wicky-up for shelter, and causing the parson and Billy to wrap themselves snugly in their blankets and seek rest.

With the dawn they awoke, ate breakfast, and started, as the parson supposed, for the train, but really were going far from it, as Buffalo Billy was determined to prevent the marriage of Marry Hale to Kent King; but when night again overtook them and no white tilts came in view, the man grew gloomy as the boy grew jubilant, and once more they went into camp.

And thus it continued for a week, when one afternoon they sighted afar off a line of "prairie schooners," and the parson gave a loud shout of joy, while Billy's face became clouded, and he muttered:

"Can Kent King have changed his course? No, it is impossible for them to be 'way up here, and that is another train."

And upon overtaking the wagons they found them to belong to Russell, Majors and Waddell's train, bound to Fort Laramie with supplies, and in them were many hunters, teamsters and bullwhackers who knew Buffalo Billy well, and he was greeted with a ringing shout as he rode up, while the train-boss cried out:

"Got yer whip, my boss boy bullwhacker, fer yer kin git a job right here?"

"No, Mr. Simpson; I'm on another lead just now; but the parson and myself will keep company with you for a day or two."

"As long as yer please, Billy," and he added in a low tone, "what in the name o' thunder is yer running double with a Gospil sharp fer? Parson, yer say? Waal, he looks as cheerful as a corpse at a wake; but ef he's your friend, boy pard, I'm as glad ter see

him as though I'd run a nail in my foot, an' ef he'll sling us a leetle gospil ter night, with a Psalm throwed in, we'll pass round ther hat fer him, as ther Doxology biz hain't as good as bullwhackin'."

Buffalo Billy laughed, as he asked:

"Any news, Mr. Simpson, from Kansas City?"

"Nary news, an' we've come along quiet, 'ceptin' ther killin' o' two fellers who j'ined us, an' was goin' out with our bull-train, until they struck somethin' bound fer Denver, whar they was goin' to minin' ag'in, for they'd struck it rich in silver, an' hed been East on a racket ter see ther old folks; and now, as I live, they said you hed run 'em through on ther trail east."

"Well, where are they?" asked Billy Cody quickly, and with some excitement.

"Passed in, Billy."

"Dead?"

"They be, indeed!"

"And their names, Mr. Simpson?"

"Lordy! how am I ter know, boy? They comed at grub-time when yer called 'em Ned Oaks an' Jack Cole, but they might be knowed under other handles when at home."

"And how did they die?" asked the boy, in a low tone.

"Kilt; one was shot on guard one night by some sneakin' Injuns, and t'other foller'd soon arter."

"Did you see the Injuns?"

"We seen one hoverin' around fer a day or two afore he got his work in."

"Anybody else in the train killed?"

"Nary; an' it were hard on ther two pard's."

"Yes; hard indeed," responded the boy, while to himself he added:

"Ned Oaks and Jack Cole gone too! Well, that makes *six of the thirteen dead.*"

CHAPTER XV.

THE TEXAS HERDERS.

"INJUNS! Injuns!"

"No, they is Road Agints!"

"You are all wrong, boys; they are herd-ers, for I recognize Prairie Pete."

The last speaker was Buffalo Billy, and the others were members of the wagon train, or bull outfit, as it was usually called, which the youth and the parson had joined some days before, the latter contented to be out of danger, but discontented at being forced to remain away from the Kent King party.

The train had just gone into camp for the night, when over a divide far away appeared a band of horsemen, at the head of whom Billy Cody recognized an old man whose constant avoidance of the settlements, and continued life on the plains, had gained for

him the name of Prairie Pete, which was sometimes varied to Prairie Pilot, as he was always on hand to guide trains when at fault and knew the country from Leavenworth to the Rocky Mountains as well as he did his own little ranch on the Republican.

As he came nearer, riding a wiry mustang that showed both good staying qualities and speed, it was noticed that he was dressed in buckskin, was as brown as an Indian, possessed a face upon which beard would not grow, and had iron-gray hair that fell below his shoulders.

His eyes were black, piercing, and never quiet, and his small but tough frame was never still, while he had a habit of keeping his hand constantly toying with the hilt of a large revolver he wore on his right hip, and it was a bad habit which had frequently served him a good turn.

Behind this specimen of the real prairie man rode about thirty dashing, wild-looking fellows, all superbly mounted and attired in a suit half-Mexican, half-buckskin, and wear-ing in their belts three large revolvers and a knife, and carrying no rifles, if I except one or two of the party.

They were a band of Texas herders, or cowboys, returning home after driving a large herd of cattle to the rancheros of the North, and Prairie Pete was their guide.

They were superb riders, carried a revolver in each boot, besides those in their belts, wore sombreros encircled by gold cords and with the "lone star" embroidered on the rim, and at close quarters were a terror to meet, and were avoided, rather than sought after, by Indians.

Their horses were as fleet as the wind, and trained to perfection, while their riders could throw a lasso with marvelous dexterity, and shoot better with a revolver than could most men with a rifle.

Their leader was a *distingue* young man of twenty-five, with dark-blue eyes and long lashes that a woman would have been proud of, and the form of an Adonis, but with mar-velous strength, a nerve of iron and the courage of a lion.

"Hullo, Prairie Pete, how are you?" cried Buffalo Billy, stepping forward and greeting the old man, who threw himself from his horse, and, grasping the boy's hands, cried:

"Ding dong my cats, Billy, I'm as glad ter see yer as though I'd cotched ther measles! Put it thar, leetle pard, for you is ther dog-durnedest, ding dongdest, con—"

"Don't swear, Pete, for there's a parson along," warned Billy, with a sly wink.

"Suff'rin' Moses! A parson, a reg'lar out-an'-outer grinder o' a Gospil mill, Billy?" demanded the old man in a whisper.

"Yes, a perfect stunner to pray, and—"

"Billy, one o' our boys hes been hooked by a steer, an' another hes been kicked by a mule, an' they suffers onmerciful; hes yer parson anything in his book o' pra'er to suit them cases?"

"Oh, he can pray from creation to judgment, Pete; but come, let me introduce you to Lew Simpson, the train boss, and—"

"Hold on! Let me incherdoose you to ther cattle boys I is guidin' southward, an' they is terrors clean through, but as fine a set as sun ever shone on."

"I think I have met Billy Cody before, two seasons ago, when he was buliwhacking with Wild Bill Hikok on the Platte," and the handsome leader of the cowboys stepped forward.

"Yes, Captain Dash, I was in Cheyenne when you killed the two gamblers, when they bounced you for exposing their cheating an old traveler."

"Ah, yes, I recall the affair now, and how you kept their pard from killing me with a shot in the back. Grasp hands, Billy, and you'll find the grip of Dash of Texas is square to friend or foe, but why have you left Wild Bill?"

"Oh, he sent me with a silver train, as guide to Leavenworth, and I was working west again with an emigrant train, but got lost with the parson there, and run on Simpson's train."

"You got lost, Billy? What fer?" asked Prairie Pete.

Buffalo Billy gave the old man a wink to keep quiet, and then turned and introduced the new-comers to Simpson and the parson, who just then came up.

The herders were of course made welcome, and that night around the camp-fire they made the evening fly away, with their merry songs and side-splitting stories, to all of which the parson listened with holy horror in his face but laughter in his heart.

As there was a possibility of the herders crossing the southern trail, followed by the Hale train, at about the time they would meet them, Buffalo Billy, after a talk with Prairie Pete and Captain Dash, decided that he and the parson would accompany them on their way.

Accordingly, the party set forth at sunrise the following morning, Prairie Pete selecting Parson Miller as his special pard, and Billy riding with the young Texas leader, who said, in a determined tone, ere they had ridden an hour on their way:

"Billy, cheer up, for I'll help you through if I have to hang Kent King, excommunicate the parson, and marry the girl myself."

"I'm more than willing, captain, for though I admit I am sweet on the girl, it don't cause me to lose my health, and she's

older than I am; she'd be a grandmother to me when I got about forty; so take her, if she will love you; only I don't want her to marry a 'villain and heartless devil.'"

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE.

THE non-appearance of Parson Miller, when evening came and the train had gone into camp, caused some apprehension, when it was found, through Old Negotiate's return, that he had gone with Buffalo Billy, the news of the boy's exile having leaked out.

As for Kent King he was savage upon the subject, and two whole days the train was camped, while horsemen scoured the country in the search of the missing parson and boy, the guide swearing vengeance against Billy when he caught him, for he knew that he had been outwitted by his youthful foe.

As the storm had obliterated their trail, the hunt had to be given up, and the train continued on its way, Kent King morose and savage in humor at the ruse cleverly played upon him.

Though he had questioned Old Negotiate closely, that innocent worthy could give him no satisfaction regarding the affair; but to Mary he made known the truth and she thanked Billy Cody in her heart for this proof of his true friendship.

And thus the week given her as a limit passed away, and even the judge seemed to rejoice in the absence of the parson, but to soothe the guide's feelings, promised him that Mary should marry him as soon as they reached Denver.

Thus ten days passed away, and one evening the train pulled into one of the most delightful camping-grounds they had struck on the whole march, and it was decided to pause there for a few days to rest the people and the cattle, and to patch up the harness and mend wagons.

The first day of rest was a busy one in camp; but the second one a grand hunt was organized, on which both Kent King and the judge went for the sport, as game was plentiful.

Toward the afternoon Mary Hale, who was seated on the edge of the timber, gazing dreamily out over the prairie, sighted a band of horsemen coming, and instantly reported it to Old Negotiate who was near.

"It are ther boss boy, miss; it are him fer a fact; if it hain't, I gi'n yer my bullwhip fer yer watch an' chain."

"Do you mean it is Billy Cody?"

"Yas, miss; it's Billy, the Boy Bullwhacker, an' a boss one too, fer he can make it crack same as a regimint fightin' Injuns; an' he isn't alone, nuther."

"No, so I see. Oh! I recognize him now, and there is the parson, too, and one, two, three, yes thirty-one horsemen with them."

"Yas, miss, they is herders from Texas, an' they is a gay lot; full o' fun, full o' fight when r'iled, an' hes hearts as big as Texas steers. I guesses ther boy hes got 'em ter come inter camp with him, fer ter see ef Kent King are willin' ter keep his promise ter kill him."

"Oh! no, no, for there will be trouble," cried Mary, turning pale with dread of coming evil.

"Guess not, miss, ef yer wants ter save a row, jist knock a man down; them is wisdom words, miss, fer, yer see, some fellers talks fearful, but don't fight, an' ther men thet means biz from ther jump, saves trouble an' heaps o' tongue-lashin', as yer must remember, leetle gal, ef yer wants ter go through life quiet."

"They are a dashing-looking set of men," declared Mary, admiringly.

"Yes, miss, it are Captain Dash an' his Texas Herders, as I see now."

"I have heard of him as a very daring and handsome man."

"He are both; he'll fight fer a Chinee heathen miss, or ther under dog in a rumpus, an' they do say as he gives all his 'onest' arnin's at keerds ter poor hunters an' boys as is sick, while he'll tackle a buzz saw ef it insulted him."

"He's a snake for out-Injunin' Injuns, kin cut ther ashes off a cigar with his revolver, throws a knife ter dead center, kin lasso ther tail o' a wasp an' jerk out ther sting without hurtin' ther bizziness eend o' ther reptile, an' is a reg'lar screamer from Screamerville."

"He certainly is a marvelous man, Negotiate; but who is it that is riding with the parson?"

"Thet man are a character, miss; he's Prairie Pete o' ther plains; tough as hickory, old as Methuselum, an' a trailer as kin find a coyote track in ther trail o' a herd o' cattle. Oh, I'll negotiate he could strike ther parson's trail in a sarmon an' foller him clean through from Genesis ter Revelation."

Mary laughed at the words of Old Negotiate, as she answered:

"Well, we will soon know what is to happen, for Billy has not come back without a motive."

"No, miss; ef 'sociatin' with ther parson hasn't made him tenderfooted in ther heart, ther' will be music in ther air, an' I'll negotiate thet—"

"Hullo, old man!" called out Buffalo Billy, suddenly riding up, with Captain Dash by his side.

"I are here, Billy boy."

"So I see; and Miss Mary, too! In spite of being exiled, Mary, I have come back, and with me my friend, Captain Dash, of the Texas Herders."

Mary Hale glanced into the dark-blue eyes of the Texan, and bowed low in acknowledgment of what Billy had intended for an introduction, after which she nodded coldly to the parson, who said, in his dismal tones:

"I am glad to return to the train, Miss Hale, for my young brother lost us on the wild prairies, and we are foot-sore and weary."

"You hes been ridin', not walkin', parson, an' I don't see what made yer feet sore," put in Old Negotiate, while the maiden invited Buffalo Billy and Captain Dash to her camp as guests, and the others were led away to have their comfort looked after by the parson and the teamster.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GUIDE AND THE HERDER.

WHEN Mary and her two guests, Billy Cody and Captain Dash, reached the romantic spot, selected by the maiden as a camping-ground, they seated themselves before the tent, and Billy had just begun a funny account of his experience with the parson, when into the timber dashed Kent King, followed by Judge Hale, while afar off were heard the shouts of the returning hunters, who had been most successful.

At a glance Kent King saw Buffalo Billy bad disregarded his threat and orders, and his face grew dark with rage, as he threw himself from his horse and, not noticing the Texan, cried angrily, as he advanced upon the youth:

"You here, sir! By heaven you shall rue it."

Buffalo Billy laughed in an ironical, irritating way, but made no effort to draw a weapon, and, unheeding the cry of the judge to let the boy alone, the guide had stretched forth his hand to seize him by the throat, when his arm was grasped as though in an iron vise, and a revolver muzzle was pressed against his temple, as, in a stern, commanding tone, Captain Dash said:

"Hold! if you want a quarrel try *me* on!"

Kent King was a man of great physical strength, a dead shot, and one who was generally feared; but in the clutch of the Texan he felt that he had met his master, and he turned his glaring eyes upon him, and asked savagely:

"And who the devil are you, sir?"

"Captain Dash of Texas, and talking sound sense, Kenton Kingsland."

"Ha! you know me then?" and a look of pallor spread over the face of the guide.

"As well as you will one day know Dudley Dashwood," was the quiet reply; but it brought to the guide's lips the words:

"Good God! and you are Dudley Dashwood?"

"I am, and well met at last, with one whom I have a wrong to avenge."

"Ho! judge, boys, ho! here all of you!" suddenly cried Kent King in ringing tones, and answering cries came from different parts of the camp.

With a light laugh, Captain Dash said:

"Billy, clip this wolf's claws! Now, sir, stand there until the help you have called arrives," and he hurled the guide from him, as Buffalo Billy drew his weapons from his belt.

"Fool! do you think because two of you have disarmed me, there are not friends near?" hissed Kent King.

"I have pards near, too," and putting his hands to his lips, the Texan gave a piercing, prolonged battle-cry that brought forth thirty ringing echoes from different parts of the timber, and at once running men appeared coming toward the scene.

"Oh, father! how will all this end?" cried Mary, now thoroughly alarmed; and, hearing her words, the Texan answered pleasantly:

"Oh, do not fear, Miss Hale, for there will be no trouble."

A moment after four-score men were on the spot, and instinctively they had ranged themselves in two lines, the train men facing the Texans, and all with their hands resting upon their weapons.

"So, sir, you have come into my camp with your band of outlaws, to carry things as you please?" cried Kent King, addressing Captain Dash, and at the same time falling back toward his own line.

"I was invited here, and would not abuse hospitality, had you not attempted to kill my pard Billy Cody; but as you have begun the affair I will end it, and I make no idle threats, Kenton Kingsland."

There was something in the manner and words of the Texan that caused the thinking men of the train to feel that the affair was only a quarrel between the guide and Captain Dash, and they cared not to mix in, especially as the determined, almost indifferent bearing of the herders showed that they would be the ugliest of antagonists in a fight.

"I will have you hurled out of my camp, you accursed Texas bravo," exclaimed the guide, savagely; and the parson, who had sided with the Texans, at this bold assertion, crossed over to the train men.

"You will do no such thing, for did you fire on me, my boys, you well know, would

not let you and your backers live one minute."

The parson at once crossed back to the Texans.

"Men, this man is a Texas outlaw! Come, let us kill him and his band!" shouted Kent King, and a few of the reckless spirits, as the train men were in excess of the Texans, made a movement, as though to follow their guide's lead, and the parson, to be on the safe side under all circumstances, now immediately recrossed to the train line.

"Hold! men, we want no bloodshed here, nor will I have any. That man I have good cause of quarrel against, and if he is not a coward he will meet me, and save all trouble; if not, I will give him a trip to Texas, where he is wanted just now," announced Captain Dash.

"You is chinnin' sacred music, pard, for we doesn't want no trouble, with wimmin and children around; ther Texans an' us has no call for a row," put in Old Negotiate.

"We doesn't want none, nuther; speak up, parson, an' pour ile on ther troubled waters. Oh, Lordy! I has rid so long with ther Gospel sharp, I kin jist sling Scripture like a deacon!" assured Prairie Pete, while Judge Hale stepped forward and in his quiet way, remarked:

"My friends, it is our duty to uphold our guide, unless, as is usual upon the border here, he accepts the challenge of this Texan."

"I accept no challenge to fight the bravo, and I will give him and his band of cut-throats just five minutes to leave this camp," cried Kent King, gaining courage, as he saw that there was a desire to sustain him, and to save himself he cared not how many others were sacrificed.

Before Captain Dash could reply, Buffalo Billy stepped between the two lines and said, pleasantly:

"Pards, let me settle this trouble, for I think I can. That man, Kent King—"

"Hold! do not listen to his lies, for I—"

"Let us hear Billy, Mr. King; then you kin hev your say," interrupted a teamster, firmly, and there were a number of voices that called out:

"Talk it out, Billy!"

"Let us hear ther boy!"

"Thank you, pards! Well, Kent King got very sweet on my sister Jule, and knowing what he was I overtook him on the road and we had a talk together, and I made him say he wouldn't visit her any more, and then I started to ride away, when he turned and fired upon me—here's the scar—and falling from my horse stunned, he believed me dead and rode away."

"Ah! ther cussed wolf," said Prairie Pete.

"He is worse, for he would now force

Mary Hale to marry him, and her father, for some reason, *dare* not refuse; but to prevent it, I got the parson lost—”

A burst of laughter here interrupted Billy, while Parson Miller scowled daggers at him, now knowing how cleverly he had been taken in.

“As soon as I got good backers I returned to camp, determined to prevent the marriage of Mary to Kent King, and I tell you frankly, his life will be the forfeit if he carries on his high hand here, for this is Captain Dash of Texas, of whom you have all heard.”

That the words of Buffalo Billy had made a deep impression on the train men was evident, for Mary Hale was beloved by all, and a low murmur against Kent King ran through the crowd, which was suddenly checked, as Captain Dash leveled a revolver at the guide and said, sternly:

“Move one inch, Kenton Kingsland, and I will kill you.”

The guide glared upon him, but he loved life, and knew his life would be the forfeit if he stirred, while he said in a tone not wholly firm:

“Men, will you put up with this outrage to your guide?”

“They must! Were you worth fighting for, as true men they would uphold you; but, as it is, you are my prisoner and shall go with me to Texas.”

“Judge Hale, do you utter no protest?” cried Kent King, now feeling that he was entrapped and fearing, from some cause, to return to Texas.

“What can I say, King?” almost whined the judge, who was as pale as death.

“Coward! I will expose you, at any rate;” and raising his voice he said in a loud tone:

“Men, this coward here who will not aid me now, was once—”

But a form suddenly dashed forward, and with a telling blow full in the face Buffalo Billy felled the guide to the ground.

All were startled by the sudden act, and Captain Dash said sternly:

“Hold! Billy! This man was my prisoner.”

“I care not; he shall not out of mean revenge, make known the secret of his power over Judge Hale,” was the spirited response.

“You are right, Billy; he shall not,” answered Captain Dash.

“Yas, the boy’s right.”

“He’s a daisy on wheels.”

“Bully for Billy Buffalo, the Boss Boy Bullwhacker!” and other cries arose, while Judge Hale gave the youth a lock of gratitude he never forgot.

“Brazos Bob, try your fancy knots on a lariat around this gentleman, and for fear he may tell a lie, and thereby fail to emulate the immortal father of his country, gag him,”

commanded Captain Dash, and a tall Texan stepped forward and quickly bound and gagged the now thoroughly-subdued guide, in whose favor only the parson now raised a faint remonstrance, which Old Negotiate cut short by the warning remark:

“Better not let them Texas devils hear yer, parson, or yer’ll go on a journey with ‘em, an’ they might *lose* yer in ther Staked Plain.”

“Heaven forbid!”

“I’ll negotiate my ole coon-skin cap ag’in’ yer scalp, they will.”

“Verily, my brother, thou art Job’s comforter; but I’ll say no more, for the wicked should be punished, and it may be a dispensation of Providence that the guide is thus nipped off in the noonday of youth; yea, verily.”

The sudden capture of the guide cast a restraint and also a gloom over the encampment, though Kent King had never been liked in the train.

Feeling this moody humor, the Texans, in their light-hearted way, got around the camp-fires, and with their really fine voices raised in merry song, drove away the blues from all, except Kent King, who lay bound in a tent with Brazos Bob keeping guard over him.

At the camp of the judge were gathered Mary, Captain Dash and Buffalo Billy, and the Texan was entertaining the maiden with some thrilling stories of the wild life he led.

At length Judge Hale approached and called Buffalo Billy aside, and the two walked over to a fire around which some of the principal train men were assembled, evidently engaged in conversation upon some urgent matter, in which the boy held a conspicuous part.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUFFALO BILLY’S LUCK.

“Boy, we has sent fer yer ter catechise ye on various subjects,” said a gray-haired emigrant, who had been steadily following the “star of empire” westward for forty years, having first emigrated from Vermont to Kentucky, and “squatted;” from there to Leavenworth, which place he had just taken a “new departure” from to settle in Colorado.

“Well, Mr. Bent, I am ready to answer any question I can.”

“Hang ther *Mister*, boy; call me Silas Bent, fer that’s my handle—Silas Bent, Esquire, fer I were a squire in old Kentucky twenty-five year ago. Now, jedge, you catechise ther youngster.”

“We wish to know, Billy, if you know the country between here and Denver?” asked the judge.

"I do, sir."

"And can guide this train there?"

"As easily as I could go from your old home, judge, to my mother's."

"So I thought."

"You hain't tootin' yer horn too loud, is yer, boy?" asked Silas Bent, Esquire.

"No, squire, I let others blow for me."

"Waal, thar is plenty as keeps up a devil of a blowin' 'bout yer in this heur camp, an' don't ye forgit it, Billy, boy; but go on with yer catechis, jedge."

"Well, Billy, we've talked the matter over among ourselves, and there is no fault to find with you, though some do not like the way you treated Parson Miller."

"Why, judge, I treated him prime; I'd run a buffalo down and then lasso and hold him until the parson came up on Goliath and slew him. Then I did the cooking, built our wicky-ups, saddled his mule for him, and—"

"What did ther parson do, Billy?" asked the squire.

"Eat, drink, sleep, snore and pray."

"Waal, he did work hard, for I hes seen him feed, an' I hes heard him sleep."

"And heard him pray, too, eh, squire?"

"No, jedge, only once. I levants when he ras'les Scriptur', fer I is gittin' old, an' life's too short to listen to ther parson pray. No, I hasn't time, jedge."

"Well, let us settle this matter with Billy. What do you say, my boy, to becoming our guide in the place of King, whom these Texans swear they will take away with them? We will give you, say, three hundred for pulling us into Denver."

"I care little for the money, judge, but I'll be your guide with pleasure; for, though I don't want to speak ill of a man in bad luck, I tell you Kent King was heading into a country where road-agents are mighty thick, and are allies with Injuns, and if he isn't a renegade, then I mistake him."

"Ef we thought that, Billy, we'd lynch him right heur," said a teamster.

"No, let him alone, for Captain Dash has an account to settle with him, and he won't bother us any more," answered Billy.

"So be it. Now, Billy, you is our guide; but don't lose ther parson ag'in."

"I'll have no cause, squire," said Buffalo Billy, with a boyish laugh, and he turned away with the judge, who asked him to accompany him to his camp.

So wrapped up was Mary in the conversation of the dashing Texan, that she failed to hear the approach of her father and Billy, and turned crimson when the latter said:

"The parson generally talks Mary to sleep, captain; Kent King made her mad, but it looks as if you were pouring honey in her ear, she smiles so sweet."

"Oh, Billy, don't be silly!"

"Why, Mary, it makes you poetical, too! The Prairie Poetess we'll have to call you."

"Don't call him Billy now, Mary, for he's our guide."

"Our guide? Indeed! allow me to offer my congratulations, Billy—I mean *Captain Cody!*" said the gay girl grasping his hand warmly.

"Accept my good wishes, too, Billy; and, judge, allow me to say that, boy though Cody is, there is no better guide on this border, and his pluck I have seen tried; but I must say good-night, for we make an early start."

"And Kent King, sir; may I ask your intention regarding him?" queried the judge in a tremulous tone.

"Oh! I'll take him to Texas and be guided by circumstances as to what I will do with him."

"You will not kill him?" eagerly asked the judge.

"That depends upon whether I turn him over to the authorities there, who want him for crimes he has committed, and which will hang him; but good-night."

"No, captain, before you go sing for Miss Mary my favorite song. Here is her guitar, and I know you play," pleaded Buffalo Billy, taking up the instrument and handing it to the Texan, while Mary urged:

"Yes, captain; please do!"

Running his fingers with the skill of a master over the strings, the Texan broke forth into a song, one of Moore's Melodies: "Believe me if all these endearing young charms, Which I gaze on so fondly to-day, Were to fade by to-morrow and fleet in my arms, Like fairy gifts fading away— Thou wouldst still be adored, as this moment thou art,

Let thy lveliness fade as it will: And around the dear ruin, each wish of my heart, Would entwine itself fervently still."

His clear, pathetic tenor voice arose on the air in sweetest melody. Every sound in the encampment was hushed, while grim men and wearied women breathlessly listened.

"Another verse! please," pleaded Mary, and so he continued to the end of the beautiful poem, and, with a pleasant "good-night," arose and strode away, accompanied by Captain Billy.

But the spell he left behind him remained unbroken, and down deep in the heart of Mary Hale sunk the first strong love of her womanhood, and she dropped to sleep that night with the name of the handsome Texan upon her lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CONFESSION, AND A SECRET OVERHEARD.

THE night in the train encampment passed slowly away, especially to the prisoner, who

could only conjecture what his fate might be now that he was in the hands of a man whom he had bitterly wronged in the past—yes, bitterly wronged indeed, for a wolf in lamb's clothing he had won the love of Dudley Dashwood's sister, to in the end cruelly desert her, and drive her to take her own life.

Returning home, after a long absence, Captain Dash, as he was known in Texas to the herders had sworn vengeance against Kenton Kingsland, and long wished to meet him, and at last Fate had thrown him across his path.

With the dawn of day the camp began to wake up, and soon all was bustle and work, for the train was to pull out that morning to go once more on the march westward, while the Texas Herders were to keep on their way southward.

By invitation of the judge Captain Dash breakfasted at the Headquarters, as Judge Hale's camp was called, as did also Buffalo Billy, and the Texan thought he never saw a more beautiful girl, than looked Mary in her dark blue riding habit and slouch hat, which she had donned, intending to pass the day in the saddle as was often her wont.

After breakfast the judge and Billy went among the wagons, to superintend their getting off, leaving the Texan alone with Mary.

For a moment neither spoke, and then the maiden said:

"Do you ever expect to visit Denver, Captain Dash?"

Instantly he faced toward her, and answered in his frank way:

"That depends wholly upon you, Miss Hale."

"Upon me?" and she arched her eyebrows in surprise.

"Yes, for I know of nothing else to call me to the vicinity of Denver, but to visit you. I am a frank man, Miss Hale, and it doesn't take me long to love or hate any one, and I'm honest enough to confess to you that you have wrapped yourself so entirely around my heart, that your face will ever be before me."

"I know not whether I am making this confession to one already mortgaged to another, and I care not; but certain it is that I am coming to Denver one day to ask you to be my wife, and, be your answer yes or no, you'll ever find Dudley Dashwood your friend."

He held out his hand as he spoke, and unhesitatingly she placed hers in it, as she answered softly:

"Come to Colorado to see us."

"I will. Good-by, and don't feel anxious on the trail, for Billy Cody is a boy in a thousand, and will pull the train through all right."

He pressed the hand, again said good-by, and started for the tent where Kent King lay a prisoner.

As he approached, he heard the voice of Judge Hale say pleadingly:

"I certainly did all that I could, Kenton; but I was powerless, and I beg you not to add more grief to my sorrows and tell of my past act."

Captain Dash frowned; he scorned to be eavesdropper, and coughed so as to give warning of his approach; but neither the judge nor the prisoner seemed to hear it, and then came Kent King's reply, in a determined, triumphant tone:

"Ay, Judge Hale, I will tell all of your wickedness—tell how you were left the sole guardian of my wealth, and, because my high temper caused me to take life and be sent to prison for it, you squandered in speculation my fortune—"

"I believed I could double it, Kenton."

"Bah! you may say so, but I believe you spent it in riotous living, old man—"

"No, no, Kenton, I—"

"Keep silent and hear me! When at last I escaped from prison and you read of it, expecting a visit from me, you fled with Mary to this wild border, forgetting that, as an escaped convict, here would be the most likely place for me to come."

"No, no, Andrew Hale; had you kept faith with me regarding Mary, she would now have been my wife; but as you did not, I will denounce you—"

"Save yourself the trouble, Kenton Kingsland, for I know the power you hold over this old man, and if you breathe one word of the secret to any one, I swear, by heaven! I will tie you to the back of a horse, and turn him adrift upon the prairie for the wolves to run down, and feed upon your dainty flesh," and in the opening of the tent stood Captain Dash, the Texan.

At his words, Kent King turned pallid as a corpse, and Judge Hale trembled; but, allowing no reply, the Texan called out to one of his men to bring the guide's horse, and a moment after, with burning eyes, white face and set teeth the prisoner was in his saddle, his feet bound securely on each side to the iron rings, in the horse-hair girth.

Placing a bugle to his lips, Captain Dash blew a call for his men, and soon after the Herders wound out of camp, their leader at their head, and Kent King riding by his side while Mary Hale and her father stood gazing after them, with strangely different emotions filling their breasts, for the judge said half-aloud:

"He overheard the secret against me, and treated me most kindly; he is a noble fellow."

And Mary's thoughts were:

"Well, he falls in love like a Mexican; but I hope he won't fall out as quickly, for, if I keep on admiring him for a year in the same ratio I have in a night, I'll be what Billy calls dead gone. Ah me, I hope all will come right in the end!"

Ten minutes after she was heading the train with Buffalo Billy by her side, and fully appreciating his responsible position of guide.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEATH-LIST INCREASES.

SEVERAL days after the parting of the Herders with the Hale train, Buffalo Billy was riding a couple of miles in advance, looking for a good camping-ground for the night, when he espied a motte in the distance, and running from it on either side a line of cottonwoods, that told him that a stream was near.

Toward this he headed, and riding into the cool shade of the timber, he was suddenly surprised, and considerably startled by a ringing laugh.

It was not a joyous laugh, but one that seemed almost demoniacal, and it came from the thicker growth of timber bordering the banks of a limpid stream.

Cautiously he approached the spot from whence came the sound, even Little Gray impressed by the strange laughter, and Billy half-tempted to believe it came from some supernatural source, for plainsmen, like sailors, are more or less superstitious.

Nearer and nearer he drew, the laughter now ringing wildly out, and then dying away into low moans, and presently, through an opening in the trees, he beheld a human form, and then another and another.

Two men prone upon the ground, and it was evident from their upturned faces that they were dead; but the third was in a sitting posture, and was gazing out upon the stream, while his hands were clasped about his head.

And upon the air floated an offensive odor, that the young guide knew arose from decaying flesh, and his eyes became riveted upon a semicircle of hideous beasts, gaunt, hungry wolves, kept at bay by that living human being, though they whined and sharpened their white fangs, preparatory for the feast they patiently waited for, and which they knew must soon come.

And, as the boy looked, again arose that wild laughter that sent a chill to his heart, and then came words from the parched lips of the man who gazed upon the ravening wolves:

"Oho, ye red-mouthed tearers of human

flesh, you are feasting with your eyes now; but you will not have long to wait ere your fangs gnaw my bones. Cowards! why don't you spring upon me and tear the life out of me, for I long to die, for, oh God! how I suffer!"

"Ha! ha! ha! how you fear me; how brave I must be that my look keeps you at bay."

Captain Billy could stand no more, and rode forward into the opening, his coming scattering the wolves in all directions, and bringing from the man the pleading cry:

"Oh, you have come at last! you will kill me, won't you, and end my agony?"

Throwing himself from his saddle the boy approached the man and gazed into his face, to start back with a cry:

"Good God! you are Hugh Farley!"

"Yes, what there is left of me; but who are you that calls me by name?" and the sunken eyes were turned upon the youth with a vacant stare.

"I am Buffalo Billy; don't you remember—I guided you, and Hank Hayes, and Benton Burke and others, thirteen of you in all, across to Leavenworth?"

"Yes, we had silver, oh! so much silver! I know you now, Billy, for you told us how to bury the silver, and you will soon bury me."

"No, no, you will soon be all right! Come, tell me what is the matter, pard?"

"I am hungry."

His tone was so plaintive that it brought tears to the brave boy's eyes.

"Oh! don't mind that, for I have plenty to eat, and my train will soon be along and you will be well cared for. Now tell me what else ails you?"

"He shot me, Billy; wasn't it cruel?"

"Shot you! who shot you, pard?"

"He did! see; one bullet broke my leg, and another hit me here on the head, and he thought I was dead like poor Tim Mayo and Prindall there, whom the wolves want so bad."

"By the Rockies! Hugh Farley, you say true, for there certainly lie Mayo and Prindall," cried Billy, recognizing now in the bloated death-blackened faces two more of the silver miners' band.

"I'll bury them, pard, so the wolves can't get them, and—"

"If the wolves are as hungry as I am, Billy, let them have them," was the plaintive reply.

"No, no, they deserve a better fate, Hugh. Cheer up, old man, for the train will soon be along, and then you shall have plenty to eat, and be well cared for. Now eat this piece of bread, and tell me who killed your friends, and shot you?"

"Sh—! I dare not tell, for he would kill me, too, and I don't want to die, now I have seen you, Billy; I want to get well to go back to my old home in Delaware, and carry plenty of silver to make my parents happy in their old age, and, Billy, I want to live to —to—kill him."

Seemingly overpowered with his emotions, he grew black in the face, and Billy expected him to die then; but he rallied and said:

"Little pard, I have been here by my two dead friends for three days and nights—oh! such long and dreary nights, and I have suffered, oh, so much, for see, my leg is broken."

"I see it, poor fellow!" said the youth, a glance at the fearful wound showing him that the leg must go, and the chances of saving his life were doubtful.

"We were going back to the mines, Billy; Tim, Prindall and myself, and were taking our chances, having missed the other boys at Leavenworth, some having gone back with the trains, and others not having arrived; well, Billy, we camped here, and suddenly he came upon us, and we were so glad; but oh God! Billy he is here now! look, there he stands!"

Buffalo Billy wheeled quickly, his revolver in hand; but nothing was in sight, other than the dead, the skulking wolves, Little Gray feeding near, and the wounded man.

"No, he is not there, pard," he said, kindly.

"He is there, Billy, so don't let him kill me! See! he is creeping up to kill you, too! Quick! Oh quick! for the love of God!"

With a wild shriek the poor crazed man struggled to his feet, bearing his weight upon his shattered leg, and then with a groan of anguish, he sunk upon the ground.

Kneeling by his side Billy tried to revive him; but the minutes flew by, and the crackling whips and shouting of the teamsters sounded louder and louder as the train drew nearer and nearer its camping-place, but still Hugh Farley remained unconscious, and with each breath his pulse grew weaker, until at last the heart-throbs ceased forever, just as the wolves, recognizing at sight of the train, that they would be driven from their feast, set up a long, dismal howl in chorus, and scampered away out of sight.

"Poor Hugh! What a sad fate you and Tim and Prindall have met! Three more added to the death list, leaving four more of the thirteen.

"Are all doomed, I wonder?" and the boy turned to greet the judge and Mary, who just then rode up, and gazed in horror upon the sad tableau.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SILVER STAR MINERS.

WITHOUT a serious accident, and in good time, the Hale train pulled into Denver one afternoon, and after a rest of a day, still under the guidance of Captain Billy, headed for the place of settlement, already selected by the emigrants.

Having seen the party encamped on their own ground, and bidden farewell to the judge and Mary, whom he promised to visit again some day, Billy Cody, with the golden reward of his valuable services in his belt, returned to Denver, where he passed several days making certain inquiries, as though about to set forth upon some trail with an important object in view.

Having gained what information he desired, the fearless youth set off alone for the mines, and not long after sought shelter in a shanty of considerable pretensions, which by courtesy, and a vast stretch of imagination was called the Palace Hotel.

When not on the trail Billy consulted his comfort, and seeing that he had the "dust" to pay for palatial (?) accommodations, the landlord gave him a ten by eight room, of course on the ground floor, there being no second story.

The furniture of this den consisted of a bed without sheets, a crippled chair and a boot-jack, and there were several bullet-holes in the door, suggestive of the thought that some unfortunate former occupant had been besieged there, perhaps for his board-bill, and mayhap by a Vigilance Committee who wanted him to emigrate for the country's good.

Not finding his quarters enticing in the daylight, Billy sauntered into the office, which also did duty as a social hall, bar-room, and, as was often the case, dueling-ground.

Here, in listening to the conversation of the miners there assembled, Billy learned of a serious accident that had that morning occurred in the Silver Star Mine, which was the property of a dozen or more diggers who had "struck it rich" some years before.

"I tell yer, pard," said a heavily-bearded miner, "Carl Moran has struck it rich sure, fer thar hain't another one o' ther gang out heur now."

"Was all kilt?" asked another.

"All but Moran, fer they was workin' down in ther shaft when ther rock broke loose an' fell in, while he'd comed out ter git some feed, an' they was about ter foller."

"How many was thar, pard, you say?" asked a miner who had just come in.

"Dave Perry, Dead-Eye Dan an' Tony Parker—all prime fellers, too."

"Then Carl Moran has got the mine all to himself?" asked Buffalo Billy, stepping forward.

"He hes fer a Bible fact; but it's about played now, as ther dust is all dug out; but what they has in partnership, Carl hes charge of, an' I guesses he'll start East now, fer it's enough ter make him han'some rich. Does yer know him, youngster?"

"Yes, and all the others too, who were in partnership with him. Where is the Silver Star Mine, for I would like to go there?"

"Moran isn't thar, fer ther sight o' his dead pards sickened him, an' he's up at ther Miners' Hotel whar he boards, an' he's feelin' awful bad, an' I don't wonder, poor feller, when he see ther big rock at ther top o' ther shaft fall in on ther boys."

Buffalo Billy heard no more, but wended his way to the Silver Star Mine, finding it, by following the crowd flowing in a steady stream of humanity toward the scene of disaster.

There, lying upon the rocks were the three mangled forms, which had been extricated from the shaft; but with a glance at the dead, Billy walked to the mine, and closely examined the rock from which the piece had broken which went crashing down upon the toilers below.

"That rock has been undermined until it took but a slight blow to break it loose. Well, there lie four more of the thirteen; I wish I could have arrived sooner to warn them of their danger. Now but *one* remains, and *he too is doomed.*"

Returning to his hotel, Buffalo Billy "kept dark" for the rest of the day—in fact for the remaining three days he remained in the mines.

Still, by adroit questioning, and keeping his eyes and ears open, he seemed to have gained some important information, for he left the mines early one bright morning, evidently determined upon his future course.

CHAPTER XXII.

TRACKED.

"Boys, I guess I'll drop back with my wagon this morning for awhile, but I'll catch you by camping time."

"What's in the wind now, pard?"

"Oh! a year ago I *cached* a little dust in this neighborhood, as my wagon broke down and I thought I'd dig it up now, as I've got enough to keep me from coming West again."

"Some of the boys will help you if you want them."

"No, I'll do it myself, thank you."

"Keep your eyes open for Injuns."

"There are not any around, I guess."

The speakers were Carl Moran, whom the reader has before met, and the last of the thirteen miners, and Al Haines, the captain of the silver train going East.

The scene was the small stream upon which the miners had camped the night after the breaking down of their wagon.

As the train pulled out of camp and disappeared over the divide, Carl Moran remained behind with his six-mule team and large wagon, already containing a goodly fortune in silver.

When he saw the last wagon tilt out of sight he sprung into his saddle, on one of the wheel-mules, and drove down-stream for a mile, when he came to a halt, and took from his pocket a piece of paper.

"Yes, this is the tree, and so many paces due west I'll find the first stake," he said, with a triumphant smile in his evil face.

Driving on his quick eye soon caught sight of the stake for which he searched, and which was only a couple of inches above the ground.

From there on he followed the stakes until he went over a rise into a place where the prairie became almost a shallow valley.

"Ha! ha! ha! here is the spot, and beneath my feet lies the treasure for which I have so deeply dyed my hands in blood."

"See, it has sunken, as will a grave when the coffin rots, or earth settles; but I'll soon have the precious metal in my wagon, and then ho! for the East, where I can live like a prince."

Backing his wagon up to the spot, he sprung to the ground and taking his spade began his work, which to his sordid nature was a delightful task.

What mattered it to him that the sweat dropped in beads from his brow, and large blisters came upon his hands with his hard work?

He was digging for wealth, and as many a man before him, minded not the pain and fatigue.

At last his spade struck something that gave a metallic ring; it was the iron hooping encircling a box of silver, and soon the treasure was revealed, and one by one were torn from their resting-place and put into the wagon.

"A splendid two hours' work; now to overtake the train, for it would seem a just judgment upon me, if the Indians were to capture me," and he cast a suspicious glance around him, but saw no danger in sight.

"Up, mules, up! You have a double load to draw now."

The strong animals gave a tug at the traces,

but ere the wheels turned a dark form suddenly glided around the wagon, and with a cry of horror, as though he had seen a spirit, Carl Moran beheld before him one he well knew.

"Hold! Carl Moran, I have the drop on you."

"Why, Buffalo Billy, is it you? I am more than glad to see you."

"You lie! you would rather see the devil than one who knows all your deeds of crime to gain the treasure we buried here."

"Boy, what do you mean? This is my treasure, so be careful," warned the man, savagely, but not daring to move, as the youth's rifle pointed at his heart.

"One-thirteenth of it, yes; but the other twelve-thirteenths, Carl Moran; where are the owners?"

"It is all mine, for I bought out the interests of all, excepting the one you saw force me to kill him in Leavenworth."

"You lie! He was not your first victim. Your first lies in a grave not far away, and you poisoned him, I now believe."

"Your second victim you killed over a game of cards; your third and fourth you started West with and cowardly shot in their sleep one night; your fifth and sixth you played Indian to kill, when they stood guard in a western-bound train; your seventh, eighth and ninth you cowardly murdered, for they expected no harm from a friend, as they believed you, and poor Hugh Farley, whom I found drugged and crazed, dared not tell who had done the deed; but I knew, Carl Moran, as I know also that your tenth, eleventh and twelfth victims were crushed to death by the rock your devilish ingenuity undermined and hurled down the shaft of the mine upon them."

"Now, with a fortune, their fortune in your wagon, you have come here and dug up the balance, that you might revel in the luxuries and ease it will bring you. But I say no, a thousand times no, Carl Moran!"

"In the Fiend's name, what mean you, boy? Because you hold me in your power would you rob me?"

"Oh, no; Death shall rob you."

The man was now white with fear, and cried in trembling tones:

"Would you kill me?"

"As I would a snake, Carl Moran; but let me tell you it is not to rob you of your treasure; oh, no. See! On this paper are the names of your twelve victims. When your guide, I found out their real names and where they lived, and this treasure goes to their heirs, whoever they may be, to be divided equally."

"And mine?" gasped the man.

"You have often said you had no near

kindred, and lucky for them you have not, as they wouldn't own you, so *your share* goes to the common pot to be divided."

"By Heaven! you shall not rob me of my wealth if I die for it," cried the man with sudden boldness.

"Oh, you'll die for it, I can swear, for I have tracked you to kill you. Some twenty miles back, since you crossed the Platte, one of Russell, Majors and Waddell's bull outfits have been following your silver train, and I have been dogging you since you left Denver."

"To kill me?"

"Your head is level on *that* subject, pard; I intend to take you back to the bull outfit, and when I tell you that Wild Bill is the boss of it, and I have already told him of your killing game, you may know that you'll be hanged as soon as the train reaches a tree to string you up to."

"Boy, I'll give you half of this treasure if you'll let me go free."

"It isn't yours to give, you accursed assassin!"

"Then take it all and let me go!"

"Nary! I've got it all now, and you, too. Come! dismount and let me tie you, for I'll drive the team."

"Great God! is that Wild Bill?"

Instinctively Buffalo Billy turned his head, and, caught off his guard, Carl Moran threw himself from the saddle right upon him, knocking his rifle from his grasp, and both going down to the ground together, and clutching in the desperate struggle which both well knew was for life or death.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

DRIVEN to frenzy, Carl Moran grasped Buffalo Billy in his powerful arms, for he was a man of great physical strength, and endeavored to draw his knife.

But the boy was as wiry as a serpent, and remarkably strong for his years, while he possessed wonderful powers of endurance, and his antagonist soon felt that if he gained the victory it would by no means be an easy one, and he used every effort to free his hands from the grip of his young foe, so that he could use either his knife or pistol.

But, with a tenacity and strength that was equal to Moran's, Billy held on, and though they struggled fiercely, rolling over and over neither could gain the mastery of the other, nor the slightest advantage.

When Carl Moran had made his spring from the saddle, Buffalo Billy had turned just in time to catch his wrists in a grip of iron, and after that he knew that it resolved itself into a matter of endurance, for if his grasp failed first, his foe would be able to

use his knife or pistol, while if the man first gave out, then the boy could get hold of a weapon and end the struggle.

"Curse you, boy, we are on even terms, now; and do you know what I'll do with you?"

"Shut up, Moran, for I've no wind to lose now answering conundrums," was the plucky reply.

"I'll cut it short soon."

"You ought to, for I am only a boy; but I doubt it."

"We'll see, you young imp of Satan!" and once more there was a fierce struggle for the mastery, but Billy, though underneath, still held his grip.

But gradually his muscles began to feel the terrible strain, and he felt that the man must conquer, yet determined to hold out to the last.

And weaker and weaker he grew, until he began to count the seconds he had to live, for he did not doubt for an instant but that the man would kill him.

"Ah, youngster, you are failing fast."

"Not yet, you devil," and as the boy spoke he suddenly gave a long, loud call.

In an instant the sound of coming hoofs was heard, and a shout broke from the boy's lips, as a horse dashed over the rise.

"Come! Little Gray, come, and save me!" he shouted.

"Good God!"

The cry broke from the man's lips now, and the next instant he gave a shriek of pain and terror, for Little Gray, seeing the danger of his young master, rushed up with savage fury, and seized the shoulder of the man in his sharp teeth dragging him backward, and ere he let go his vicious hold, the keen blade of Buffalo Billy's knife sunk to the hilt in the heart of Carl Moran.

"Boy, curse you! you have conquered," came from the pallid lips.

"You are mistaken, Carl Moran; Little Gray has conquered," was the reply of the panting boy, as he threw his arms around the neck of the noble horse and said, caressingly:

"Gray, old boy, you have saved my life, and I love you so much."

The faithful animal seemed to understand fully the service he had rendered, and rubbed his nose against his master's cheek with a low neigh of pleasure.

A moment after the boy turned toward the man whom he had slain, and the glassy eyes met his own; but they were fixed in death, for Carl Moran, the last of the Doomed Thirteen, had met his fate.

Throwing his body into the hole from whence the treasure had been taken, Billy hastily filled it up, and, mounting the saddle-mule, and calling to Little Gray to follow, he drove off due west and at as rapid gait as was possible with the heavy wagon.

A drive of fifteen miles and the white tilts of a wagon-train came in sight, and half an hour after Wild Bill had heard the strange story of his young *protege*.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

TRUE to his promise to himself, Buffalo Billy, upon reaching his home, wrote to the kindred of the twelve men whom Carl Moran had slain, and told them the story of the miner's death, as the reader already knows it, and placed to their credit the share due them out of the treasure, after which he determined to please his mother by remaining at home, for, around the family hearthstone he had told the story of his adventures, and the fate he had saved his sister Julia from, for, but for her brother's opposition, the lovely girl might have married Kent King the Gambler Guide, of whose fate no one knew, though it was rumored that he had escaped from the Texas Herders, and had leagued himself with bandits.

Of Wild Bill's sad death by the hand of a professed friend, who turned assassin, the reader doubtless knows; but he does not know that Buffalo Billy's roving nature quickly drove him to the plains again, where he figured in a new character as Pony Express Rider; nor, is it known to the reader, that, in keeping his pledge to visit Mary Hale in her far-away home, Captain Dash, the Texan, met with many thrilling and romantic adventures, which in connection with the daring exploits of Billy Cody, the deeds of Prairie Pete and Old Negotiate, the eccentricities of the parson, and mysteries connected with the past life of Judge Hale, will form a theme for a sequel to this story of *living characters*, under the title of "BUFFALO BILL'S BET; OR, THE GAMBLER GUIDE."

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